JEDI KNIGHT II STRATEGIES: HELP FOR DESPERATE PADAWANS

COMPUTER GAMING WOR

JULY 2002 ZIFF DAVIS

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First look at Tom Clancy's Raven Shield

EXCLUSIVE RAVEN SHIELD SCREENS & INFO!

RATINGS REVEALED

20+ Reviews!

The Sims: Vacation
Dungeon Siege
Heroes of Might and Magic IV
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3

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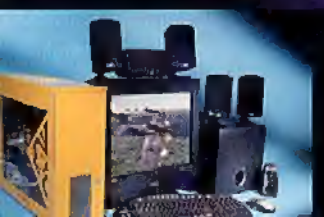

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Neverwinter Aurora Toolset
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BioWare/Infogrames
Neverwinter Nights...
With the Neverwinter Toolset, building a playable world is simply a matter of clicking, dragging and dropping. You create the dungeons, forests, cities, the labyrinthine caves and mines.
New game
Campaign
Single player
Multiplayer
Tutorial
Module Name: Unlimited Adventure
From the Power of your
Tileset
City
Rural
Dungeon
Crypt
Castle
Forest
Mines
Sewer
Interior
Cavern
Load...
F1 F2 F3 F4 F5
Mouse(x:18 y:37) Grid(row:3 col:1) Tile(TDE01_A02_07)

Monsters
Animals
Dragons
Elementals
Giants
Planar
Humanoid
Insects
Miscellaneous
Constructs
Undead
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<<Loadmodel_Demon, 12443>>Balor
Spells
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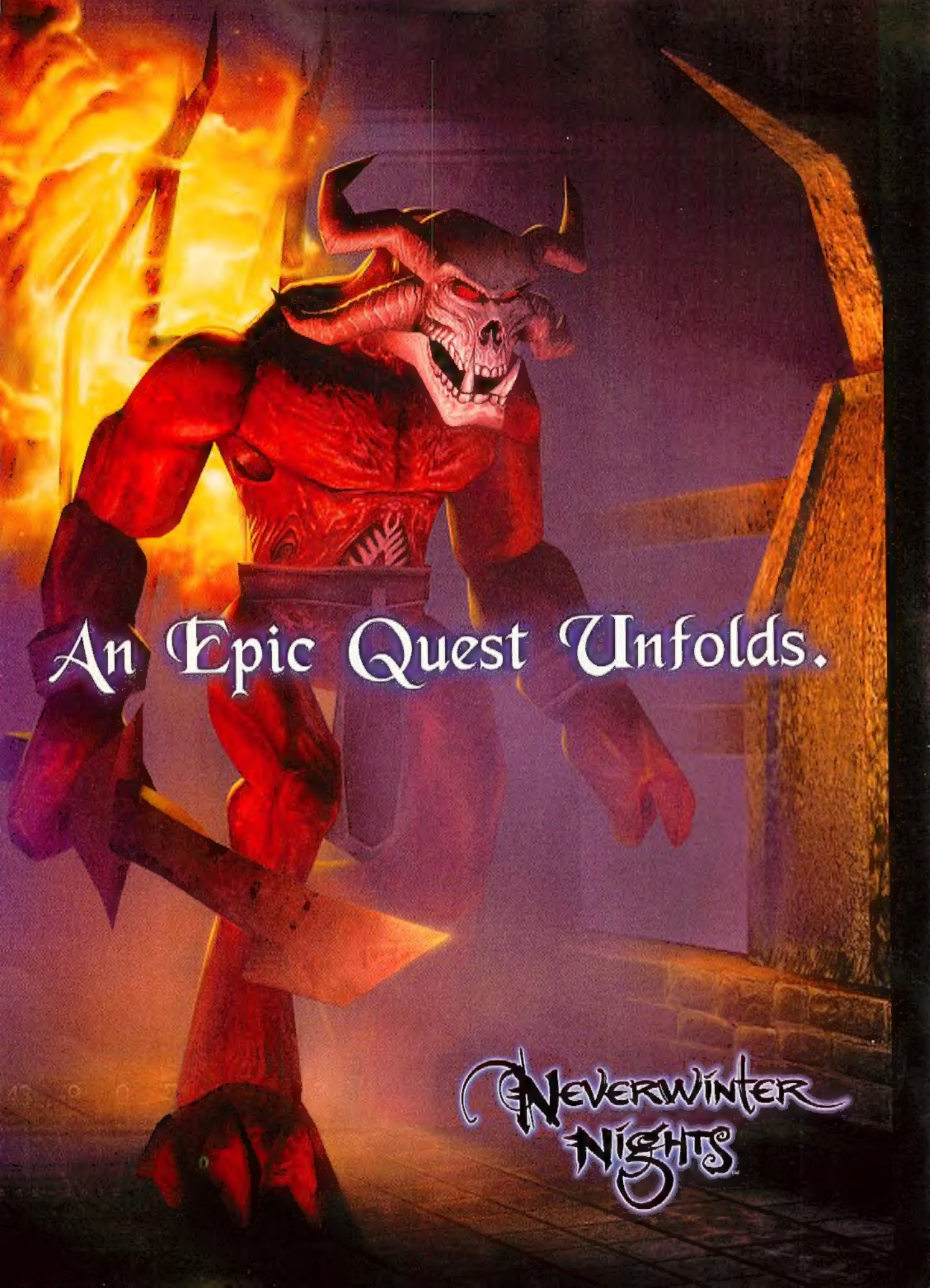
Custom A.I. script
Imagination...
By allowing the gamer to participate online with over 60 players at once, Neverwinter Nights is unparalleled in scope as well. Through the use of interlinked portals, players can journey throughout persistent worlds,
Creating area...
Bridge
Enable Multiplayer. Server size: 64 players
Aggression maximum
Combat Round Started...
Fight
F8
F9
F10
F11
F12
Running Integrated Client/Serv


An Epic Quest Unfolds.
Neverwinter Nights

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD
July 2002 Issue #216

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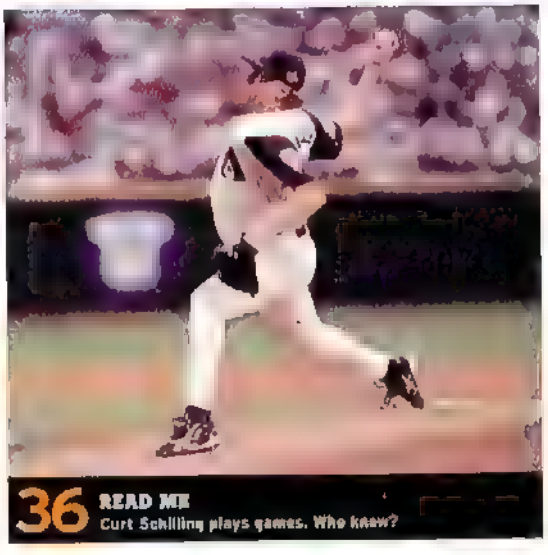

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Mal'Ganis
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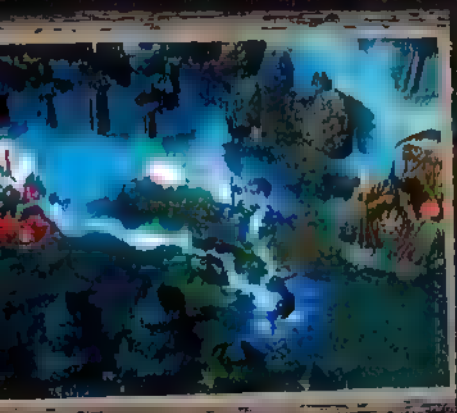

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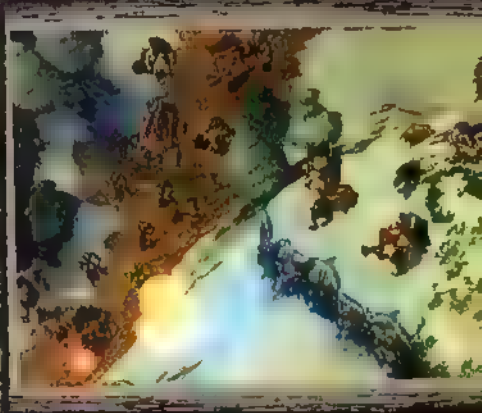

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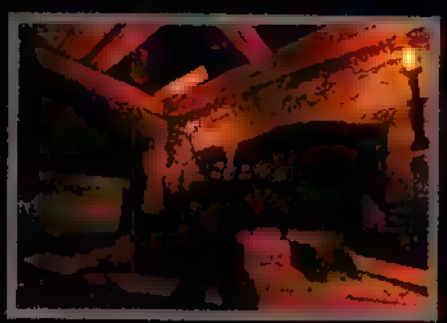

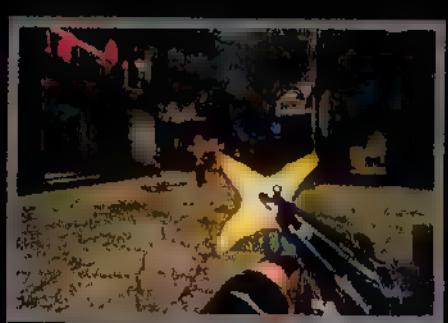

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Game-Killing Bug

It's all fun and games, my friends, until you have a kid. My gaming days came to a crashing halt in early February with the birth of our first child, Cody, who came into the world shrieking like an Alien chest-burster and has had a surprisingly similar effect on our lives. True, I haven't found the cat's slimed carcass rotting in a corner with a hole chewed through its skull, but in every other way it seems like we're settling in for a protracted battle with a Xenomorph. One that surely won't end until he reaches 40 or graduates from college, or both.

How did it come to this point, where I'd rather be playing something—anything, even *Messiah*—than wiping our little cherub's bum? It wasn't long ago, when my mom suggested I turn my gaming room into a nursery, that I asked why she wanted me to grow plants. Such are the dangers of falling in love and getting married. They should be postponed, nay, AVOIDED, until you have lived and done everything you really want to do.

I know how to kill all manner of creature, but take care of a baby for four hours?

But sometimes, despite your best stalling tactics, calamity befalls you, and as happened to two of my colleagues at this very magazine, your significant other "forgets" to take the pill. What will a lifetime of gaming prepare you for?

Virtually nothing. As much as we gamers may think that we're wise in the ways of the world ("Yeah, I could land this jet if I had to"; "Man, put me in charge of the military and I'll take care of this problem"; "That carpet doesn't at all match those drapes"), there's nothing I've seen in a game that can quite prepare you for what to expect in real life. I know how to kill all manner of creature, but take care of a baby for four hours? That's murder.

Which is not to say it's Game Over. After a few short weeks, the new mom (whom we'll affectionately dub "the egg layer") should be far more concerned with tending the nest than tracking your movements. That's when it's time to rediscover your inner gamer, put on the headphones, and hit the Escape button. Because it's far too early to let the little bastard win.

Ken Brown
Editor

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Letters

Tell poor Chim-Chim you'll be his friend at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Packin' Heat?

I was just wondering—do you guys and gal have someone from the Magic Kingdom doing your artwork? On the cover of the April issue, I can see panty lines. I thought that maybe it was just me, but then I saw your May issue. On page 7 the *Freelancer* picture has a guy who's packing more than a gun. The highlighting technique reminds me of *The Little Mermaid* castle. I notice these things 'cause I only look at the pictures, but I hear you write well, too. Keep up the good work.

Beancloud

We're Evil

Hello, evil ones!

I just wanted to drop you a line and let you know how evil and malicious you people are. Just as I'm content with my gaming collection and think I'm set for a few months of solid time in front of my screen playing some great games, I get your latest issue (May 2002).

Yes, your latest issue. Filled with previews and reviews of more games. And what do you make me do? You make me go buy them! Evil ones! My contentment and happiness quickly dissolve into drooling over the next *SimCity* or *Dungeon Siege* or *Age of Mythology*. My wallet's burning with the need to spend the money found therein.

That can only be evil...at least, that's what my wife would say. (And it's a good thing she doesn't read this mag.)

Gus Gosselin
Euclid, OH

I recently bought *Dungeon Siege*. I have lost lots of sleep, lost track of time, and forgotten what day it is because of this game. Your May 2002 issue cover read "Three reasons why you won't sleep in 2002." And all I could think was NO SH**! I am less productive at work now. Sure, my manager's getting pissed, but that's okay—I'm quitting anyway. You can tell Microsoft and Gas Powered Games that I absolutely despise them now. My ability to work's gone down the drain, and my social life...well...it's still the same: lame.

Mr. Clam

The Phantom Half Star

I read *CGW* every month and I greatly respect your views. However, I find I must dissent with your *Medal of Honor Allied Assault* review (March 2002). Granted, the game is by far one of the best I have ever played, with only a few minor flaws and one major one: Sniper Town. No level should ever be this hard, or have AI that cheats so badly. As the review stated, the enemy snipers blatantly cheat. They have superhuman aim and can hit me even when I cannot see them, thanks to dense foliage that should also block *their* view. Also, they can hit me no matter how randomly I move or how fast I dash across the street. In order for me to defeat them, I must die numerous times while I try to discover their position based upon the sounds of their rifle fire, because for some reason their bullets leave no tracers for me to follow, and the compass is of no help to me. All these frustrations occur on the normal difficulty setting. I can only imagine the hell that is the hard setting. No game has ever provided me as much satisfaction as *MOH*, only to subsequently crush it under anger and frustration at such a poorly executed level. In my opinion 5 stars should not have been awarded. Any level that so thoroughly detracts from the experience of a game should cause the game to lose half a star.

Mark Mzyk

Yes, we totally agree with you. To quote from Robert Coffey's review: "Sniper Town is the one spot where *MOH* doesn't play fair, and the difficulty of the level is such that you could practically classify it as a game-killing bug." That's why we did what you suggest: We gave it 4.5 stars. Look again.

We Stink

What the hell is wrong with you idiots at *CGW*? I love your magazine and hate it at the same time! Stop doing this to me! You give me excellent reviews and previews, but then you publish a P.O.S. column labeled Get a Life! What is up with that "Cleanliness" part (May 2002)?! If you were TRUE gamers, you would know that bathing is time you could spend honing those mouse-aiming skills you could always use more of in *Half-Life*, *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, or *Operation Flashpoint*! Shame on you!

Robert the Deranged Monkey Man from Florida

We Rule

I have to admit, *CGW* is the BEST gaming magazine out there! I don't know why everyone gives Jeff Green such a hard

"My ability to work's gone down the drain, and my social life...well...it's still the same: lame."

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OH YEAH. Here it is. The kind of music 400-watt car amps are made for. The kind of music that says you've arrived...
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Turn On the Fun

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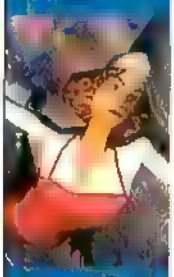

What the hell is Carrot Top doing on the cover of your magazine [May 2002]? Who's next, Danny Bonaduce?
stonecutter49

Summertime is coming up. How about Dana in a bikini? I know all of your readers would appreciate it.
Jeff

Has anyone ever told you guys you are dead sexy?
Cash

Why the bloody heck hasn't a PC game company produced a *Cowboy Bebop* game?
Adun Beaton

"I have one nightmare: seeing my favorite magazine turn into a lifestyle magazine. I see signs of it happening."

time. He's the man! Simple as that. Your Website is REALLY lacking, but since your magazine is sooo good, I forgive you. A few things.

1 The Penny Arcade comics you use are WAY too old; get some new ones.

2 Remove *Team Fortress 2* from Pipeline; it's just not going to happen. Get over it.

3 Post more about *Neverwinter Nights*.

Keep up the EXCELLENT work, *CGW*. You guys are great! Can't wait to have my own place so I can get yearly subscriptions!

Sean Dugger
London, Canada

Everybody Loves William

I was happily reading the February issue of *CGW* (I'm a subscriber in Europe, and I always get the magazine late) when I came across the review of a digital camera on page 112. It's been a while since you wrote it, so let me quote a part of it:

"Does anyone really need a digital camera that is also an MP3 player? In their quest to be everything for everyone, these devices are nothing for anyone. Which is why we're pleased with Toshiba's camera. It does one thing: take pictures."

Let me rewrite this quote:

"Does anyone really need a computer games magazine that is also a digital camera review magazine? In their quest to be everything for everyone, these magazines are nothing for anyone. Which is why, up to now, we were pleased with *CGW* magazine. It used to do one thing: review computer games."

I have one nightmare: seeing my favorite magazine turn into a lifestyle magazine. I see signs of it happening. Please don't let this happen. (Note that I'm not saying anything against hardware reviews, especially as the hardware relates to gaming!)

Miguel Bazdresch

Why, every time I get your mag lately, is there a review of some MP3 player or other nongaming device? The person doing your hardware section has denigrated the good name of the *CGW* hardware section. I think Wil O' Neal sucks at his job, and if he were in the real world, I would have canned his ass when he said he liked the Xbox. Go back to Redmond and kiss Bill's ass, Wil—that seems to be your forte!!!!

Pumpy2Lumpy

A Better Strategy: Don't Buy The Game

Thomas McDonald gave *Black & White: Creature Isle* 1.5 stars (May 2002), which basically means "don't touch it with a 10-foot pole." If this game sucks so bad, then how in the nine hells could you possibly waste five pages of your strategy section on this trash?

Give us strategy for games that you recommend, not for games that suck.

By the way, I love the mag.

Jason M.
Arizona State University

Doh. We were hoping you wouldn't notice that. Sometimes we assign strategy articles simultaneously with the reviews, so we don't necessarily know that the game in question is going to suck. In this instance, it was a case of wishful thinking. And we apologize in advance for this month's section on *Heroes of Might and Magic IV*.

Two Hundred Pounds of Good Fun

Last summer I spent my whole vacation playing *Baldur's Gate II*. I did almost nothing else. All I did was play, eat, sleep, and drink. And at the end of my holidays, I had finally beaten it three times, but the bad part is that I now weigh around 320 pounds, compared to the 120 I used to weigh. Damn you, BioWare. Also, *Counter-Strike* kicks ass. Thanks for the great mag.

The Man With a Bellybutton

Right, It's Her "Memories" You Like. Sure.

I disagree with the review by Mr. Charles Ardai of *Druuna: Morbus Gravis* in your April 2002 issue, page 103. True, every

game isn't for everyone, but in the market environment of PC gaming software that offers the player a rush from violence, *Druuna* takes a radical turn by probing a comatose woman's mind in an effort to rebuild a story through her memories, while avoiding her nightmare flashbacks of violence that will disconnect them from the active game play. As I said before, every game is not for everyone.

David Mitchell

Our Second and Last Cute Baby Picture

While I was reading *Computer Gaming World*, my son decided it was his magazine and wouldn't give it up. I think you have a new fan of your magazine.

Tony Coppola

Okay, people, we're going to say this only once: no more baby pictures. Two photos in one issue is two too many, so the rest of you can forget it. We're warning you. All future incoming baby pictures will be instant fodder for nasty public ridicule. Want to see your kid with alien antennae and a moustache in a national magazine? Don't mess with us.

Reviewing the Reviewers

I have enjoyed your magazine for quite some time now and look forward to each month's issue. One question keeps hounding me, though. When a new game, whether finished or a beta release, arrives for you to review, how is it assigned? Are the games separated by genre and then handed out to individuals who really enjoy playing certain types of games? Or is it passed to someone who currently has absolutely nothing to do?

To put this in perspective, let's say you have someone employed with you who really digs sports games. You just received the latest beta of *Dungeon Siege*, for example, and because this sports freak is the only one not doing anything, they are assigned to review the game. Well this person can't stand RPGs and has less-than-kind things to

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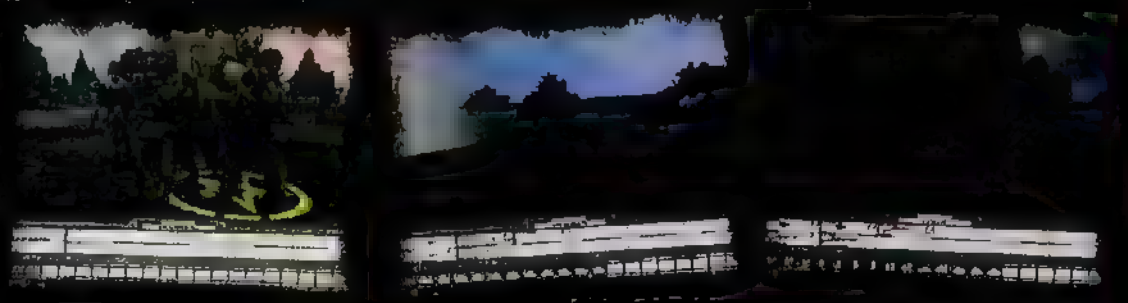

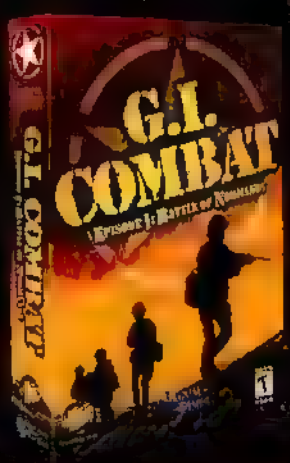

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TEEN T

Blood
Violence

say about the game. Is there someone else who must also play the game to ensure that the original reviewer's thoughts are accurate and not biased?

You'd probably be surprised at the number of people who take your reviews to heart. Thanks

Branden Leon
Simi Valley, California

Great question, Branden. Yes, we always match up games with writers or editors who enjoy playing those types of games—otherwise, the game won't get a fair shake. This is why you'll never see, for example, a baseball sim review from the sports-hating Scooter, or a review of a role-playing game from the elf-phobic Tom Price.

Oh, We'll Tell 'Em, Alright

Hey there, folks. First time dropping you guys a line. I'm the magazine equivalent of a chatroom lurker—I read it every month faithfully, but I generally don't say much. You got my attention in a big way with your Good, Bad, and Ugly sidebar (Read Me, May 2002), though, when you singled out whiny game developers in the Ugly section. Big time props to you guys—you just made a permanent subscriber out of me.

Game developers apparently need it demonstrated and explained to them that buying some ad space in your publication does not guarantee a 4- or 5-star suckup session when judgment day finally arrives. Gamers like myself, who are operating on a limited budget and can't drop coin on every piece of crap that hits the shelves, rely on your (amusingly caustic) honesty in reviews. Buying anything other than perhaps Blizzard's gear these days is like cutting a shortcut through a nasty section of town at night—you might get where you want to go, but you're more likely to end up 60 bucks lighter and with a bad headache and bruises. If any of these self-styled developers make a big fuss the next time their clone of *Survivor: The Interactive Game* gets its deserved reward, tell them I said to go suck a fart.

Folgerboy

Can You Say "Hostile Work Environment?"

I am writing in response to copy editor Jennifer Wolfe's article in the editorial section of the May 2002 issue. While her comments seem to be earnest, not to mention flattering, regarding you bozos at *CGW*, one comment in particular caught my attention. She mistakenly attributes your kindness to her endurance of your "jokes" (which I am sure are bad) or to her ability to stroke your egos. What she doesn't seem to understand is that your "gentlemanly" behavior stems from nothing short of the carnal. Jennifer, I am sorry to say that you are not; that is the sole reason that they are kind to you. The moment you step out of their presence, they devolve into mottled man-creatures with too many hormones. The truth is harsh, babe.

Anduil

The mottled man-creatures of *CGW* reply: Don't listen to him, Jennifer. Sure, yeah, you're hot, but what we really like is the way you handle our dangling participles.

Nice Try, Green

Hello to all of you great people at *CGW*. I am one of the few, the proud, and the brave female gamers out there stuck in a world filled with old men pretending to be girls on *EverQuest*, as Jeff revealed in April's issue. I love your magazine, it's arguably the best gaming magazine I've ever read, I'm even going as far as calling it the "Gamers' Bible." I think Greenspeak is the best thing that ever happened to this magazine, Jeff, and I look forward to reading it every month—I would pay eight bucks every month just to read it if for nothing else Jeff, YOU RULE!!!

Don't listen to anything anyone else tells you, you're the best person on the *CGW* crew (no offense to any of the others). Keep up the good work everyone, this magazine rocks!!!

Cassie, Minnesota

P.S. PLEASE could you put this in an issue? PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE!!!

First he impersonates a girl online, then he impersonates a "fan" so he can praise himself in the magazine. Jeff Green: Does it get any sadder?

Penny Arcade BY MIKE KRAHULIK AND JERRY HOLKINS

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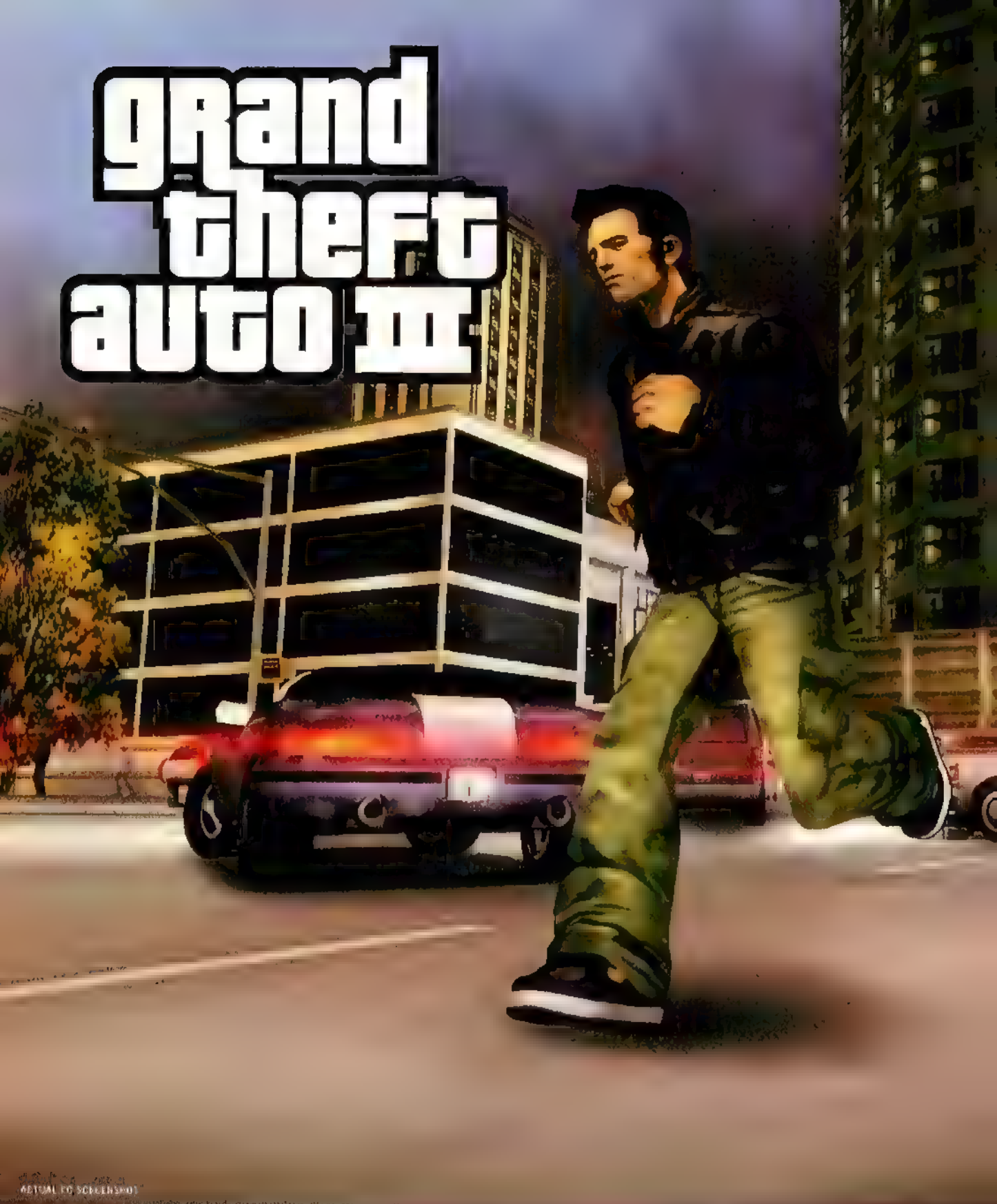

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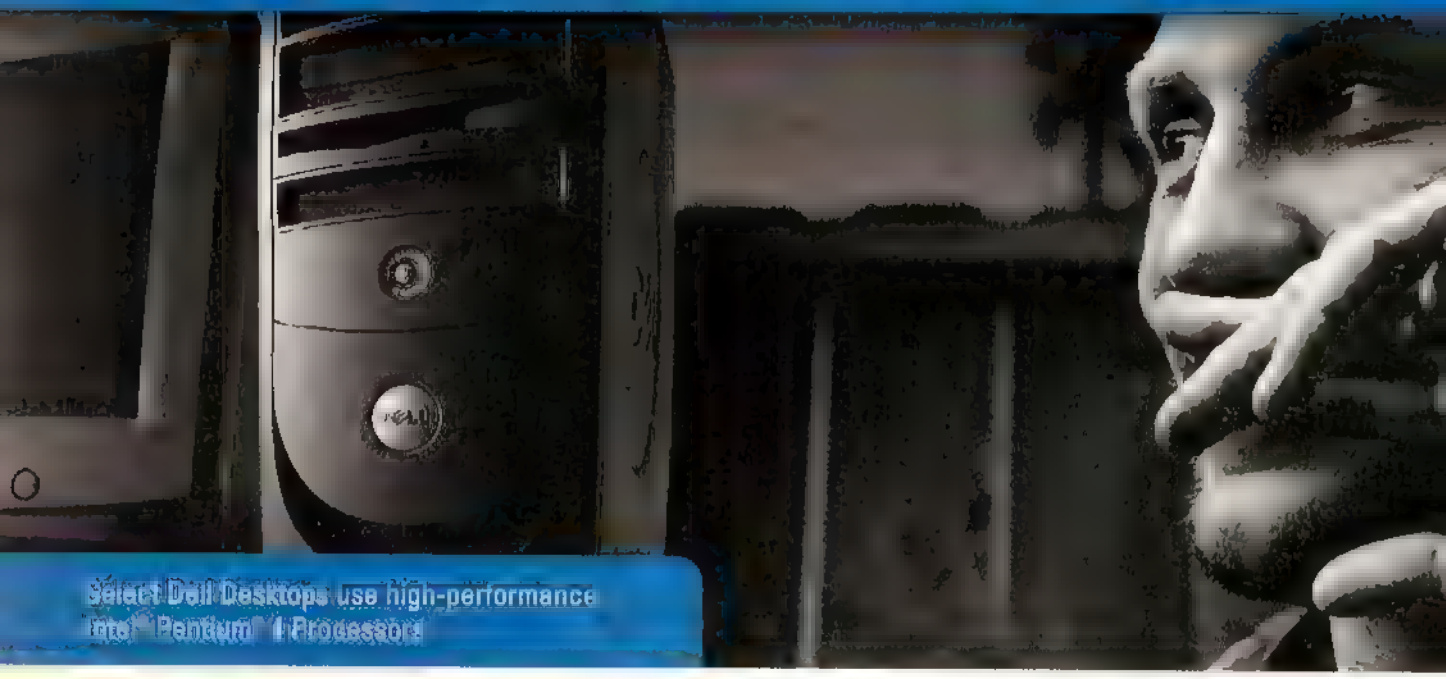

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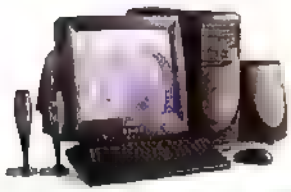

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The hottest shots of the best new games Edited by Tom Price

EARTH AND BEYOND

Electronic Arts' ambitious, unique MMORPG set in a sci-fi, outer-space milieu is seriously ramping up now. The beta test is in progress as we go to press. As in all MMORPGs, character advancement is the thing—here you play the captain of your own starship—though combat, of course, is also key. Advancement is possible through trade and exploration, allowing for a variety of playing styles. Despite appearances, this is *not* a space sim (it's keyboard-and-mouse driven). Rather, it's one of the more interesting attempts so far to expand the burgeoning MMORPG genre out of the high-fantasy realm of Elves and Faeries. Here's hoping it lives up to its potential.

These six shortcut slots, which correspond to the number keys on the keyboard, can be used for your favorite weapons or other items.

Much of your time will be spent in outer space, but you'll also have many planets to visit.
The starships were designed by Doug Chiang, lead artist on *Star Wars: Episode I* and *II*. Your ship is completely customizable from wing shape to color to decals.
Clicking the up and down arrows allows you to travel forward or in reverse, respectively, at your maximum impulse speed. The button in the center is for Warp speed, so you can quickly cross large distances.
160
<-Space

BATTLE-FIELD 1942

Don't let the military hardware fool you: *Battlefield 1942* is not some hyperrealistic, one-shot-one-kill war simulation. The guiding theme behind this multiplayer-only game is *Quake* meets *Saving Private Ryan*. No, despite your desperate wishes, that doesn't mean you'll get to take off Matt Damon's head with a rail gun or shred Ted Danson into convenient, fajita-ready chunks with a nail gun. Instead, World War II provides the backdrop for intense, fast-paced, team-based action as up to 64 players clash as Axis and Allied soldiers. More than 16 sprawling maps spread across Europe, the Pacific, and North Africa will be available when the game ships late this summer.

This wave of fighters took off from the aircraft carrier offshore and is providing covering fire for the infantry storming the beach.

Realism, schmealism. If your plane gets shot down, bail out, aim your descent toward an abandoned tank, and float right in to instantly take it over. That is, if no one shoots your parachuting ass first.

Multiple players can man stations on the more than 35 vehicles slated for the game. That means one guy can steer this battleship while up to three others bombard the shore or provide antiaircraft fire.

Battlefield 1942 will ship with a number of game modes, but they all boil down to this: capturing flags.

Gamers play as one of five infantry character classes. Too bad none of these invaders thought to play as antitank. That armor is going to mow them down.

NEVER-WINTER NIGHTS

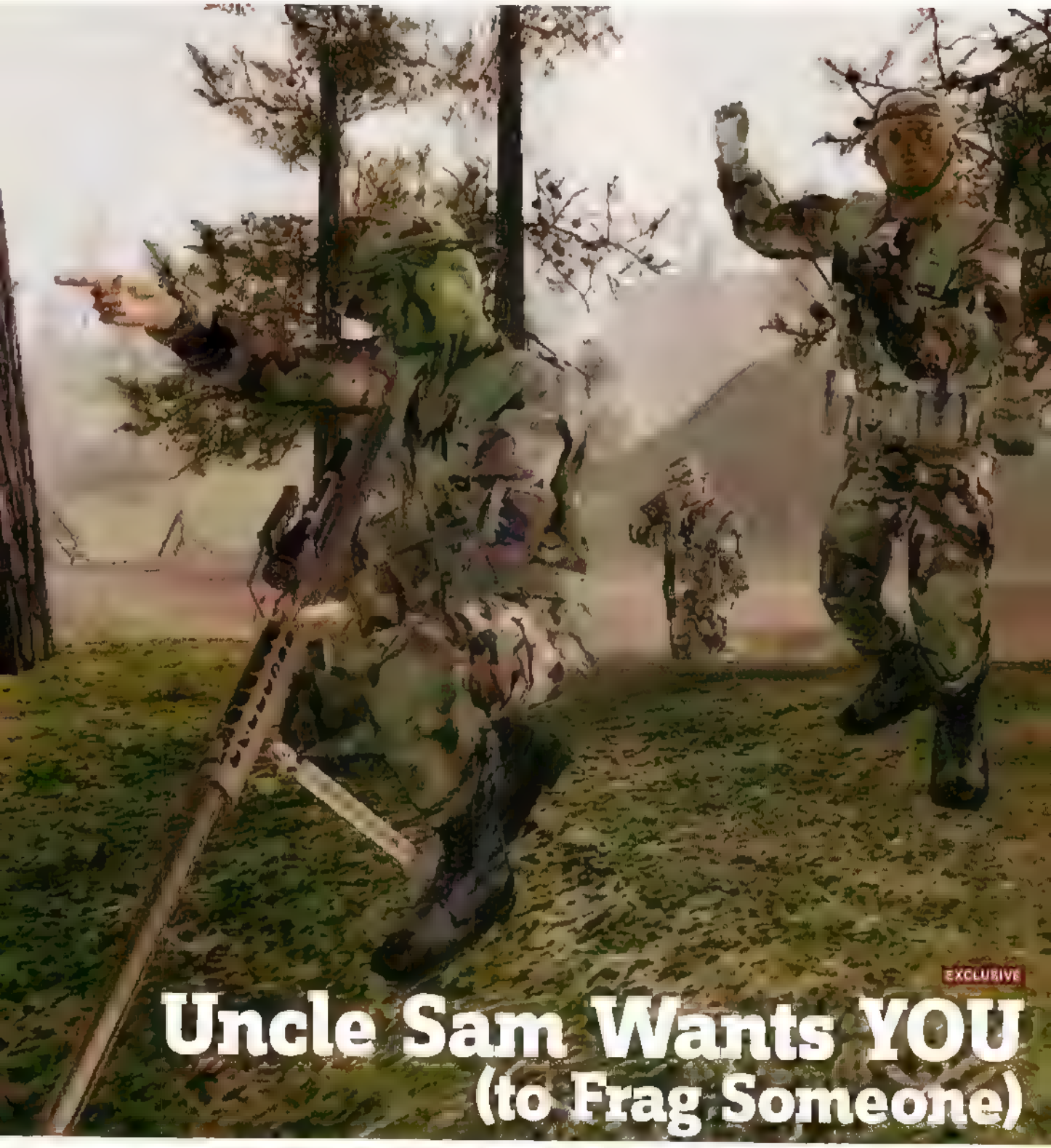
If BioWare is feeling the heat of making sure that *Neverwinter Nights* is a great game, they have only themselves to blame. That's what happens when you make a string of classic RPGs and establish yourselves as the torchbearers of the *Dungeons & Dragons* license. You are not permitted to suck. Too many of us have high hopes for your next project. And *Neverwinter Nights* is one heckuva project—the most serious attempt yet to translate the fun and community spirit of real-life *D&D* sessions to the computer. There will be a single-player campaign, but the heart and soul of *Neverwinter Nights* is the ability to create, distribute, and play user-made modules. Think you're the best Dungeon Master in the world? You'll get your chance to prove it—and share your work with the rest of the planet.

BioWare is working to make sure the real-time combat system not only looks fantastic and plays well, but also remains true to the *D&D* third-edition rules.

This scary, fiery red chap is known as Balor. Or, as one BioWare artist calls him, "Frickin' Balor."
Neverwinter Nights maintains the same isometric perspective as the *Baldur's Gate* games, but the engine is now fully 3D, meaning you'll be able to rotate the camera and zoom in on the action.
See this puny little guy? Yeah—that's you. Good luck.

Read Me

A smorgasbord of news, opinion, and random stuff Edited by Ken Brown



EXCLUSIVE

Uncle Sam Wants YOU (to Frag Someone)

The Army is developing two PC games it will release for free By Tom Price and Thierry Nguyen

INSIDE

CLANCY GAMES
Two different shooters take aim at PC players this fall. **PAGE 35**

CURT SCHILLING
Arizona Diamondbacks ace plays more than just baseball. **PAGE 36**

SHADOWBANE
Build or burn entire towns in this MMO extravaganza. **PAGE 40**

SCOTT McCLOUD
Could *Pool of Radiance* be considered art? Scott questions preconceived ideas. **PAGE 41**

The Army's games are designed to bring a highly realistic representation of a soldier's life to your PC.

In the 1984 movie *The Last Starfighter*, a young man who gets the high score on a coin-op arcade game is promptly recruited by an alien military force which, of course, planted the game on Earth for recruitment. The movie itself was silly, but the concept of recruiting soldiers through games apparently doesn't seem silly to the U.S. Army. That concept and the increasing popularity of online shooters like *Counter-Strike* and *Delta Force* were the impetus behind their latest effort to reach out to the nation's youth by developing their own game and giving it away for free.

"It's less of a recruitment tool than an advertisement for the Army," says producer Mike Capps, who along with fellow professor John Hiles at the Naval Post Graduate School in Monterey, California, leads a design team of gaming industry veterans. Nonetheless, the detailed view of modern infantry combat (thanks to one of the greatest consultant pools of all time—the U.S. military) and a game as fun and addictive as *Counter-Strike* should send more than one young gamer down to the recruitment office. Built with the *Unreal Warfare* engine, the 3D shooter called *Operations* looks much better than what one might expect from the government.

The Army is actually working on two games, a *Sims*-style 2D game called *Soldiers* (see next page) and the *Counter-Strike*-inspired *Operations*. *Operations* gameplay is fashioned after the round-based style of *CS*, but it varies thematically. Instead of counter-terrorists sporting close-quarters-battle equipment, *Operations* features loadouts and scenarios from U.S. Army experience. Weapons are treated as realistically as possible, without turning the game into an inaccessible simulation. Ballistics and weapon jams (deadly serious, as any combat veteran will attest) are modeled accurately.

It's a weird but very clever concept for the Army to develop a tac sim to promote itself.

The class system allows you to play as a sniper or a heavy machine gunner, but you can't simply choose one during setup. If you want to be a sniper, you have to go to sniper school, an offline training level that you must complete. That's in addition to the four basic training levels you must finish just to play the game. The scenarios are inspired by real-world locations, and the training levels are very detailed re-creations of real Army facilities.

Interestingly, while the matches will always be between U.S. Army infantry and terrorists, you'll *never* be allowed to play as a terrorist. No matter what team you're on, your teammates will always

A rare wise terrorist decides he'd rather live after all.

resemble fellow soldiers and your opponents will always look like terrorists.

Both *Operations* and *Soldiers* should go gold on or around July 1 and will then be distributed through magazine cover-mount CDs, bundled software, and the Internet—all free of charge. With the notion of immediately building an online community, the Army will have over 100 dedicated servers running the game, and HomeLAN has already signed on as well. The government has committed funding through 2007, and the team will continue to add content and features into the game.

It's a weird but very clever concept, the Army not only endorsing a game but actually creating one for the general public. It will surely bring up the issue of violent games and their influence on society. We bet it'll be the talk of E³, where its official unveiling will have taken place by the time you read this.

We'll Be Soldiers

The Army's other game is even more ambitious. *Soldiers* will attempt to convey the entire Army experience. Think of it as *The Sims*, but entirely in the context of the Army.

But designer John Hiles isn't jumping on some bandwagon; he worked under Will Wright at Maxis years ago and so comes with an interest in creating realistic simulations. The core of *Soldiers* is Hiles' story generator. At key moments, players can intervene and make development decisions for the onscreen avatar. This, in turn, generates an entirely new plot thread (unlike canned branching storylines in other games), which continues until the next intervention. Hiles interviewed 700 soldiers to provide the breadth of experience needed for such a game; players can become anything from a basic infantry member to a mechanic to an Army band clarinetist.

One of the most interesting possibilities is a planned link between *Soldiers* and *Operations*. Developers are tentatively planning to let gamers manage a character in *Soldiers* and import him into *Operations*, where he'd join a match with "augmented abilities to reflect the extended training. So a combat engineer, for example, could join an *Operations* match and be able to lay down barricades. Of course, this is a long-term goal, as balancing such things would be a massive task. Expect to hear more about this ambitious Army career simulator once we see more of it.

ANNOUNCED

Join the Resistance

Take on the Russians in new *Flashpoint* prequel

For the serious military sim fan, there's nothing quite like *Operation Flashpoint*, winner of last year's *CGW* Game of the Year award. If you've played through the game and hopped over to the Soviet side in the *Red Hammer* campaign, then it's time to think about joining the resistance.

Set a few years before the events in *Flashpoint*, *Resistance* puts you in the boots of Victor Troska, an ex-military guy who decides to fight a sizable Soviet buildup on the island of Nogova. The expansion includes 20 new missions, including hostage rescue, convoy infiltration, recruiting, and stealth recon.

Developer Bohemia Interactive is building several new vehicles for the add-on, including motorcycles, boats, buses, and customized tanks. Pistols and shotguns are also being created.

Bohemia is also incorporating network and graphic enhancements—the terrain in particular benefits from new high-res textures. Bohemia and Codemasters claim the add-on will be large enough to be a game in its own right.

Get ready to join the *Resistance* later this month.

The Sum of All Fears uses the *Ghost Recon* engine but plays more like *Rainbow Six*.

BANG BANG

Clancy Storm Rising

Two very different shooters–*The Sum of All Fears* and *Splintered Cell*–take aim at PC players By Jason Babler

In addition to the subject of this month's cover story, there's plenty more action in store for Tom Clancy fans. Ubi Soft is scheduled to release *The Sum of All Fears* in May to coincide with the movie premiere. The game (previewed last month) is based on events from the movie and Clancy novel of the same name, but you don't get to play Jack Ryan. Gamers can assume various roles on an elite FBI team on a mission to thwart the terrorist group in the story, by tracking the terrorists down and nailing them in locations in West Virginia, the Middle East, and South Africa.

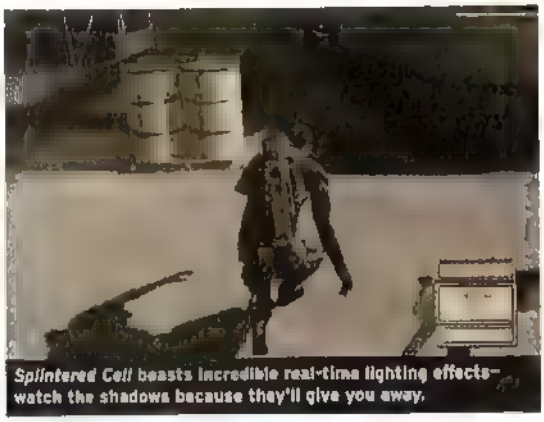
Developed by Red Storm Entertainment, creators of the original *Rainbow Six*, *The Sum of All Fears* combines the *Ghost Recon* engine with *Rainbow Six*-style gameplay. You can be part of a three-player team or join the multiplayer action online, which allows up to 36 players.

The second Clancy game isn't coming until later this year, but it's already shaping up to be a *Metal Gear Solid* killer. *Tom Clancy's Splintered Cell* has the potential to be a landmark in stealth games if it pulls off the feats boasted of at E3. Instead of having the squad-based experience of *Rainbow Six*, you play a one-man black-ops unit of the National Security Agency called the Third Echelon. The game features a third-person view with an emphasis on stealthy action. As in the *Thief* games, you'll have a stealth meter that tells you how visible or audible you are to others.

Splintered Cell will have dozens of impressive and well-animated moves. Jumping down from a high ledge can be timed with spider-fall action, which absorbs the impact on your legs and provides a silent landing behind enemies. The Jackie Chan move is even wilder: You can kick off walls in some places to straddle a hallway so you can stand above anyone walking under you, while still being able to shoot down at them!

Naturally, you'll get loads of gadgets to play with, like miniature cameras you can shoot into walls, fiber-optic cameras you can feed under doors, and thermal imaging devices to detect human heat signatures. Details like dead bodies losing heat over time haven't been overlooked, either.

Fueled by Epic's *Unreal* engine, real-time lighting will be an important element of the game. Swinging lights cast shadows exactly as they should. Cast a shadow and it will give you away. You can shoot out lights to gain advantage–or break a light bulb and wait to hear a guard walk on it. The only aspect we haven't seen yet is full AI. If Ubi Soft can pull that off, too, they could have a major hit on their hands come this fall.



Splintered Cell boasts incredible real-time lighting effects–watch the shadows because they'll give you away.

CGW INTERVIEW: CURT SCHILLING

Arizona Diamondbacks ace turns out to be a major league geek By Rob Smolka

We recently had the pleasure of sitting down with Arizona Diamondbacks' pitcher (and last year's co-World Series Most Valuable Player) Curt Schilling, to discuss his appearance on the cover of *High Heat Major League Baseball 2003*, among other topics. What struck me most about Schilling is how sincerely thankful he is to be able to use his celebrity to help others. It also turns out that he's a hardcore PC gamer.

CGW: I hear you're a big *EverQuest* fan. How often do you play?
Curt Schilling: All the time when we're on the road.

CGW: What types of characters do you play and what are their levels?
CS: A 51st level monk and a little cleric that I play, too. I got hooked. The first game I ever played was *Wizardry* on the old Apple, and it was the greatest thing since sliced bread when it came out.

CGW: You go back before then to boardgames, right?
CS: Oh yeah. I started out playing *APBA Baseball* when I was about 10 or 11. This was probably the first serious game I ever played other than *Risk* or *Stratego*.

And then I remember picking up a copy of *Panzer Blitz* and I started playing wargames quite a bit. I played *Advanced Squad Leader* a lot. Then computers came around and my best friend's dad bought the first Apple and got *Wizardry*. I can remember the whole summer being consumed with playing that game. Things just kind of took off from there with computers.

CGW: Okay, besides *EverQuest*, what else have you been playing?
CS: This winter I played through *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* and *Medal of Honor*. I liked both of them. I never was a big FPS fan, though. *Doom* was the first FPS I ever played. I liked it, thought it was okay, but then I started playing *Ultima Online*, and that was the end of that. I really like the top-down perspective of the game.

CGW: You've said that you're not really a big sports game guy. How come?
CS: It's not that I don't like them. It's just that I'm very cynical when I look at sports games from a realism standpoint. If I'm going to play a 162-game baseball season, Sammy Sosa should hit a lot of home runs, Randy Johnson should strike a lot of people out, and Ray Ordonez shouldn't hit 54 home runs! Most of the games out there are like that and that doesn't amuse me.

CGW: How did you get involved with *High Heat*?
CS: 3DO contacted me shortly after the World Series. It was something I thought would be cool to do as a father. My kid was really starting to get into PlayStation and I enjoy that aspect of gaming because it helps my son develop problem-solving skills that he might not otherwise learn.

But the thing that sold me was when we pitched the ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) idea to them (*a percentage of the sales of* High Heat MLB 2003 *goes toward fighting ALS–Ed.*), they were like, great, we'd love to do it. Above and beyond that, though, was the quality of the game. Knowing full well that this was going to sell well and be a good game, I was glad to be a part of it.

The first game I ever played was *Wizardry* on the Apple; it was the greatest thing since sliced bread.

CGW: Do you and Luis get into any arguments over your games? (*Luis Gonzalez, Schilling's teammate, is the cover boy for EA Sports'* Triple Play Baseball 2003.)
CS: We've already got a bet on whose game will sell the most. So if you guys can pad the numbers a bit...

CGW: You guys need to sit down and play each other with each game. This way you can see which is the better game without worrying about which sells more copies.
CS: That's the thing that drew me to *High Heat*. If you've got two good players in this game, you can play a realistic baseball game. And even though I'm not into the arcade side of things as much as the stats, when you can tie the arcade ability with statistical realism, that's when it's fun.

For the complete transcript of this interview, point your browsers to Gamers.com.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS

He needs a walk...
Consider yourself
WARNED

ANNOUNCED

Black Hawk Down

NovaLogic tac sim focuses on Somalia missions of 1993 By Ken Brown

Can one of the nation's most humiliating military debacles present a rewarding gaming experience? It was the basis for a best selling book and an award-winning movie, so maybe it can make a compelling game too.

After securing the rights to the *Black Hawk Down* game license (based on the brutal story by Mark Bowden), *Delta Force* creator NovaLogic is developing the game using its C4 graphics engine (a modified version of the *Comanche 4* engine).

Set in Somalia in 1993, the game lets players undertake a number of missions from Operation Restore Hope. NovaLogic says the final mission in the game will let players experience the infamous raid in Mogadishu. The team is considering numerous multiplayer options, including letting players operate ground vehicles and helicopters or even play as Somalis. But the company is careful to point out that it will not depict scenes of soldiers being beaten or dragged through the streets. And we're certainly glad for that.

The game is scheduled to ship sometime around the holiday season this year.

BAD GAME IDEA OF THE YEAR

"Spanking Runners features several addictive modes of play including Real-Time, Turn-Based, Split Screen and Hot-Seat Competitions."

–from the press release of Russian publisher 1C Company, creators of IL-2 Sturmovik

"That's right...*Spanking Runners* has Hot-Seat play."

THE GOOD, THE

THE GOOD
FREEDOM FORCE SKIRMISH MODE PATCH

Irrational Games' awesome comic-book game *Freedom Force* is still holding up as an early Game of the Year candidate–if you haven't played it yet, stop wasting time and get it. The only disappointment was that it lacked a skirmish mode for our superheroes, but designer Ken Levine says that a patch is on the way–maybe it will even be here by the time you read this. We hope so.

THE BAD
GTA3 MULTIPLAYER REMOVED

We were so psyched about the upcoming PC version of the console smash *Grand Theft Auto III* that we almost put it on the cover...but that was back when the game was going to have a 16-player multiplayer mode. Unfortunately, that feature has apparently been cut, so now we're looking at more of a straight port. We're still excited about the game–we're just sorry to see the disappearance of the one feature that would have made the console geeks drool.

THE UGLY
MIGHT AND MAGIC HELL

With the simultaneous release of two games that weren't ready yet, followed quickly by a massive round of layoffs, 3DO fired the mortally wounding shot into New World Computing's once-venerable *Might and Magic* series. Neither *Heroes IV* nor *Might and Magic IX* remotely live up to their predecessors, underscoring, once again, the sad fact that 3DO just does not know how to manage its franchises–even the ones that used to be good.

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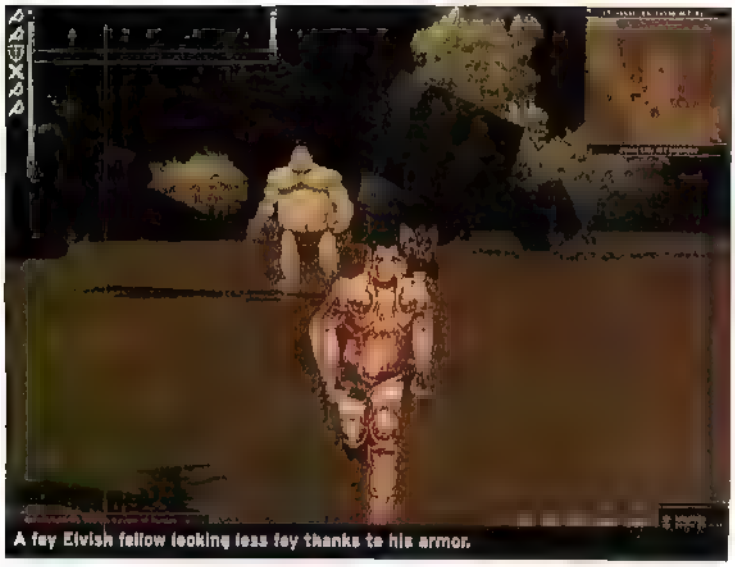
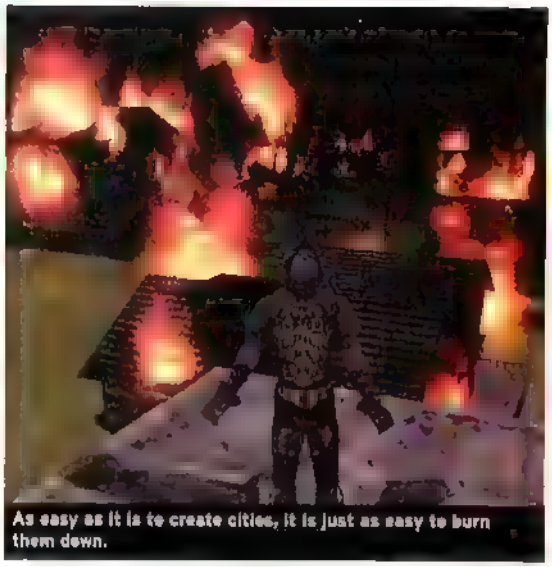


A fey Elvish fellow looking less fey thanks to his armor.



As easy as it is to create cities, it is just as easy to burn them down.

HANDS ON

Shadowbane

Build or burn entire towns in this MMO extravaganza By Thierry Nguyen

I'll admit to thinking that *Shadowbane* was just another massively multiplayer online game where you go around killing wugnutz to get that +5 Sword of Incredible Dorkitude in a futile quest for self betterment. But when I sat down with members of Ubi Soft Montreal, I realized that *Shadowbane* is more like a guild sim with real time strategy trappings.

Your character progression is about gradual refinement: You go from a broad class at the beginning of the game (for example, "fighter") to a profession at Level 10 ("ranger"). From that point on, you work on gaining different disciplines to round out your character. Two people who decide to be mages won't end up exactly the same, due to the variety of disciplines to choose from. Thanks to developer twinking, I had a Level 30+ ranger running around picking fights with dragons and whatnot, and I didn't feel like another generic ranger. Also, in addition to the default races, the game offers flying bird-people and the ultra-tough minotaurs, though these are available only to long-time players when creating new characters.

Other MMOs may have player housing where you can conduct meetings and hold loot, but *Shadowbane* lets you construct entire towns with shops and living spaces. Just buy a deed and plunk the plot of land down to get your building under construction. There are seven levels of buildings. After you've built a magic shop or a smithy, you can hire staff to keep the shelves stocked or work as blacksmiths. Of course, building and maintaining a shop, even if it sells normal, nonmagical goods, costs a significant amount of money, so you can't just pop a new building up whenever you feel like it. But this system lets player guilds create entire towns by themselves. Another fun feature for player-created towns is the ability to put up a kill list of players that NPCs of the town will automatically shoot on sight. Be careful about pissing someone off and then walking into a nearby town; they might have convinced their buddies in town to add your name to the list. Alternatively, if you have the cash, you can just build a trebuchet and go in and wreck the whole place.

Make someone mad and you could wind up on a kill list, where the NPCs will automatically shoot you on sight.

The character-advancement model is solid, but the real-time-strategy elements are what make *Shadowbane* an MMO to watch out for.

REALITY CHECK

Reality Check compares the ratings of the major gaming press with GameRankings.com, which averages all published reviews for a particular title.

GAME	CGW	PC Gamer	CGN	Gamespot	IGN.com	GameSpy	GameRankings.com
Bridge Commander	B+	B-	A	B+	A	A-	B+
Destroyer Command	D	B	*	F	C	*	C
Freedom Force	A+	A	*	A	A	A-	A-
NASCAR Racing 2002 Season	B+	A	A	A-	B+	A	A-
Mall Tycoon	F	D	D-	D+	D+	*	D
Tiger Woods 2002	B-	B	*	B+	B+	*	B+

* NO RATING AVAILABLE AT PRESS TIME

DISCOVERING GAMES

#7 Games & Art?

There are a few games, like Tim Schafer's *Grim Fandango*, which enthusiasts refer to as "*works of art.*"

by Scott McCloud

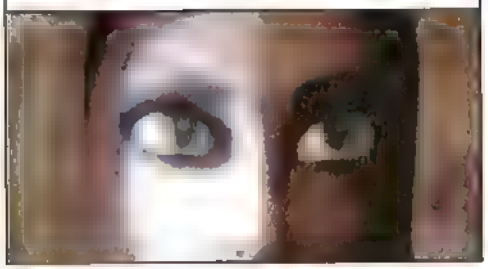
After finally *playing* G.F., I can see why some feel it *makes the grade*. It's a *beautiful* and *elegant* piece of work with a clear *imaginative vision* guiding it.

But in christening something "*art*" are we saying that other, *less lofty* productions belong to some *soulless limbo* of *non-art commercialism?*

I think there's *a degree of art* in *any* act of creation, from *oil painting* to *cake decorating*, and game development is *no exception.* When players encounter a game like *Grim Fandango* or *American McGee's Alice*, they can intuitively grasp that the degree of art in its creation is *much higher* than usual.

And it's *equally obvious* in cases where a game is created just to fill *shelf space* that its creation was a largely "*artless*" process.

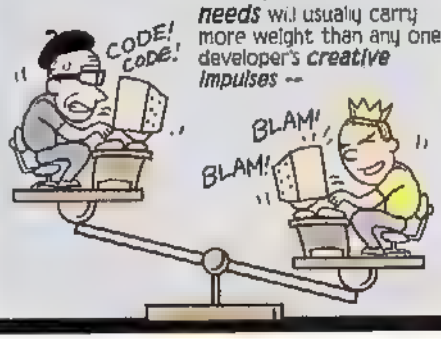
Though no one can agree on the *exact meaning* of the word, *art* seems to flourish most when a creative mind is focused on the *inner life* of the work itself and least distracted by *market niches, daily quotas,* and *conventional wisdom.*



Game design is a tricky place to *express* oneself. The creative multimedia CD-ROMs of the early and mid-90s featured more *art* than straightforward *gameplay* and have all but *disappeared* from the market.

The Residents' Bad Day on the Midway (1995)

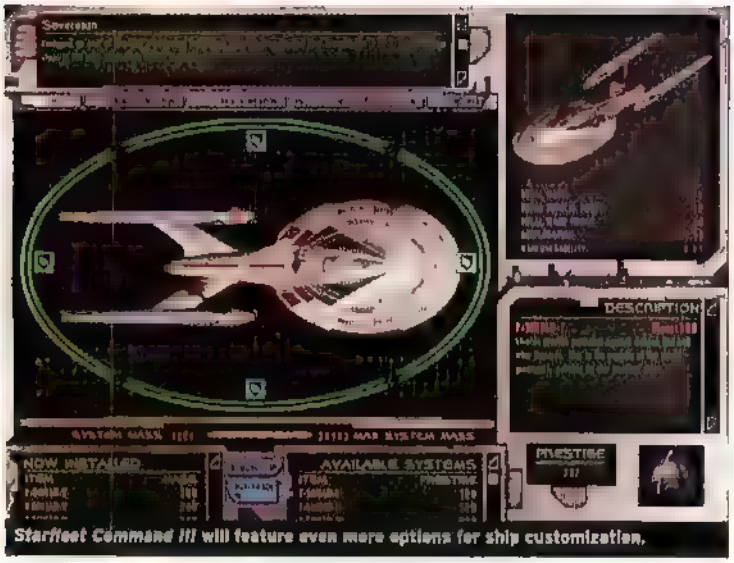
In an entertainment-driven marketplace, *users' needs* will usually carry more weight than any one developer's *creative impulses* --



-- especially considering how much *money* is at stake.

But it's the *innovative mavericks* in *any medium* who can help chart *unexplored territory* --

-- and help take their *chosen "art"* to the *next level.*



Starfleet Command III will feature even more options for ship customization.

COMING SOON

Starfleet Command III

This spaceship comes with training wheels
By Robert Coffey

Taldren and Activision have locked up the hardcore *Star Trek* crowd with the first two *Starfleet Command* games. With the third version of the series, they're going after more casual fans with a game that sports some significant changes from previous versions.

This is the first *Starfleet Command* set in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* universe. As a result of this as well as a mandate to make the game more accessible, *Starfleet III* will not be driven by the *Starfleet Battles* rules of the first two games. Freed of the original series-centric *Battles* rules, *SFCIII* will have streamlined gameplay elements. The interface has undergone an enormous facelift. Power management is simpler and split between impulse and warp power. Reduced management means players will focus on the essentials—primary weapons, heavy weapons, and shields. Even readouts are being altered for ease of use. The shield meter is now made of four simple blips instead of six.

The playing experience will feature more emphasis on story. You'll play through three sequential campaigns—Klingon, Romulan, and Federation—each with its own distinct flavor. As for the plot, Taldren is relying less on random scenarios and focusing more on crafted missions that determine the pace and feel of the game.

Will these changes draw new fans or just alienate the old ones? We'll know this November when *SFCIII* leaves port

NEWS FEED

Infogrames Grabs Shiny, Matrix
Infogrames has purchased Shiny Entertainment (*MDK*, *Sacrifice*) from Interplay for approximately $47 million. The deal also includes worldwide rights to develop and publish games based on sequels to *The Matrix* movie. The movie sequels are due in summer and November of 2003.

RollerCoaster Tycoon II
Infogrames is on track to release a sequel this fall to *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, which has now sold 4 million copies. Chris Sawyer is once again heading up the game's design, which will reportedly feature an improved ride creation system, new shops and stores, new park themes, and a scenario editor.

RETROSPECTIVE POST-MORTEM

By Bruce Geryk

Tropico

Computer games are all about creating the illusion of an alternate reality. In sim-type builder games like *Caesar III* and *SimCity*, how well a designer creates this illusion greatly affects how well the game works. When I first heard about *Tropico*, I was intrigued by the idea of playing the dictator of a tropical island. Unfortunately, when I actually played the game, I didn't feel very much like a dictator.

Look at the manual for *Tropico* and you'll find short profiles about dictators in the margins. Most are about Central and South American despots (Pinochet, Somoza, Trujillo), although for no apparent reason you'll also find Benito Mussolini and even Nicolae Ceausescu. Even more bizarre, you'll find Violetta Chamorro, who was not only freely elected, but also wasn't a dictator. Read their biographies, and you'll find that most of these less-than-savory people used lots of extralegal tactics to stay in power. Torture and execution come up a lot. But guess what you can't actually do in the game.

I'm not suggesting that a computer game should simulate torture and mass executions. (Although considering that other games allow you to beat people with crowbars in a drug-trafficking underworld or to invade Poland as the Nazis, I'm not sure where the line of good taste now lies.) What I am suggesting is that the reason *Tropico* doesn't have much replay value is that it's a dumbed-down *Caesar III* with less complex interactions that tried to replace gameplay with atmosphere, in much the same way *Majesty* did. But *Majesty* at least had a cute concept going for it, and *Tropico* falls flat. Instead of making a real caricature or a banana republic, it simply sanitized all the yucky stuff, like Pinochet binding and dragging people and tossing them out of an airplane. If you're going to choose a topic for a game in which some elements are very clearly off limits, you'd better exaggerate the heck out of the other stuff.

In the much-more-fun-than-*Tropico* game *Junta*, you are often subjected to shelling of the presidential palace by the gunboats of the Admiral of the Navy (who sports a gigantic generalissimo hat). In *Tropico*, you are never shelled by the gunboats of the Admiral of the Navy.

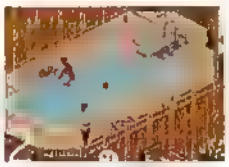
Games about dictatorships shouldn't have to be sadistic or depraved—I don't want to play a game with a graphic NKVD crackdown. But just as *Hogan's Heroes* was able to make the very unfunny topic of being an Allied prisoner in a German POW camp hilarious by mercilessly poking fun at the bad guys, *Tropico* could have made the whole "I'm in charge here, just look at my big hat!" leader thing hilarious. Instead, it took out the violence and made the game essentially a straight feed take on cigars and bananas.

RANKINGS

CGW Top 20

Sims: Vacation cashes in quicker than an evening in Amsterdam

Take your Sims where you should be: on ***Vacation.***



The Sims: 6 million copies sold and still going strong.

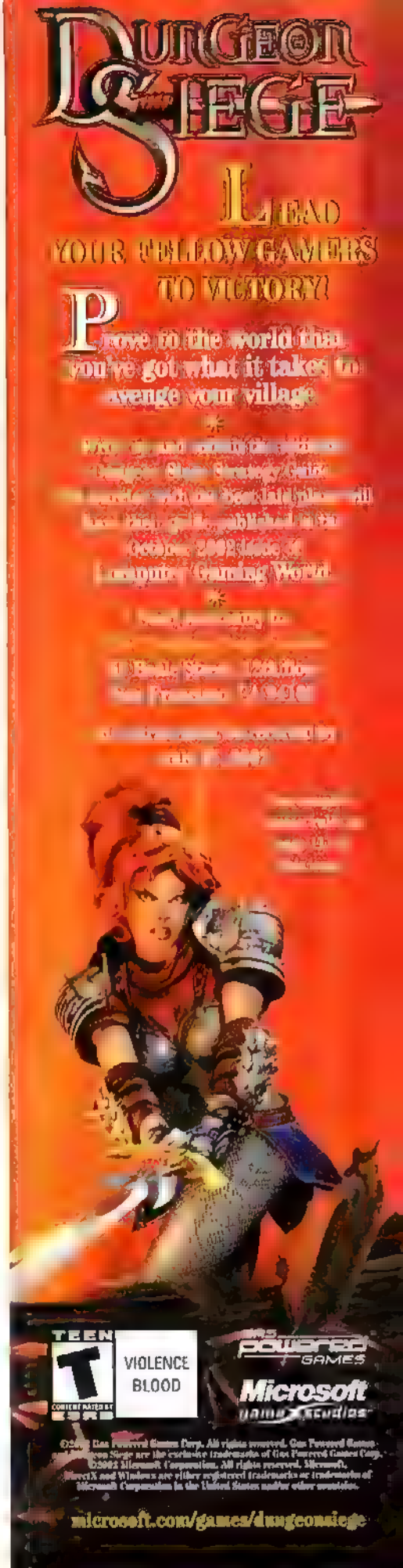
Medal of Honor gets a hero's welcome from gamers.

NOTABLE QUOTE

"The initial code name for Xbox was Project Midway—they don't want the Japanese people to know that because it will hurt their feelings."
–from Dean Takahashi's book *Opening the Xbox*

Rank	Last Month	Game	Rating
1		**The Sims: Vacation** ($30, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
2	4	**The Sims** ($42, Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
3	1	**Medal of Honor Allied Assault** ($44, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
4		**Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast** ($47, LucasArts)	★★★★★
5	3	**The Sims: Hot Date** ($28, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
6	2	**Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone** ($27, Electronic Arts)	★★★½☆
7	18	**Command & Conquer: Renegade** ($42, Electronic Arts)	★★★½☆
8		**Dungeon Siege** ($49, Microsoft)	★★★★½
9	[illegible]	**RollerCoaster Tycoon** ($21, Infogrames)	★★★★☆
10	7	**The Sims: Livin' Large** ($28, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
11	5	**Microsoft Zoo Tycoon** ($26, Microsoft)	★★★½☆
12		**StarCraft: Battlechest** ($22, Vivendi Universal)	NR
13		**Heroes of Might and Magic IV** ($45, 3DO)	★★½☆☆
14	11	**The Sims: House Party** ($29, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
15	12	**Backyard Basketball** ($19, Infogrames)	NR
16	13	**Diablo II: Lord of Destruction** ($29, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★½
17	16	**NASCAR Racing 2002 Season** ($43, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★☆
18	9	**Civilization III** ($47, Infogrames)	★★★★★
19	19	**Sim Theme Park** ($18, Electronic Arts)	★★★★☆
20	14	**Empire Earth** ($47, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★☆

MARKET RETAIL SALES RESULTS BY NPD INTELECT



RIDICULE

Nation of Imbéciles

French carry on tradition of ineptitude with new "realistic world simulator"

By Erik Wolpaw and Bruce Geryk

For *SuperPower*, French developer Golem Labs tapped into the rich European intellectual tradition, creating a game that bills itself as "a realistic strategy game set in a real world scenario." Tapping into the uncultured cowboy instincts we Americans rely on to dig the Europeans out of whatever morass their intellectual tradition has gotten them into, we decided to use *SuperPower* to predict the outcome of recent global conflicts.

Normally we'd put a disclaimer on something like this, clearly stating that it's for entertainment purposes only and is not to be used as a basis for foreign policy or betting. But luckily for readers who are professional gamblers or professional secretaries-general of the European Union, that won't be necessary here, because the A.I. in *SuperPower* is infallible.

1. Russia vs. Chechen rebels. Nothing seemed to happen for several turns until our crack Russian espionage forces discovered that Kazakhstan was funding the insurgency. We responded by trying to isolate and destabilize the Kazakh government, to which Belgium replied by breaking our cultural exchange treaty. And then invading Mexico.

2. Israel vs. Arab nations: Faced with massive funding of Palestinians by its neighbors, Israel invaded Syria. In a masterful display of the deadly art of reverse psychology, every other Arab nation rallied against Israel by invading Syria as well. Unamused, Belgium broke diplomatic relations with every country in the Middle East, and then invaded Guatemala, initiating World War III.

3. Ethiopia vs. Eritrea—also known as Vietnam II: Belgium vs. Vietnam.

4. United States vs. Iraq: Before we could start the invasion proper, Iraq asked us to sign a cultural exchange treaty, followed by a request to purchase 316 meats and 4 wealths. Inveterate virtual dove Erik spent the next 30 turns in meat negotiations with Iraq, at which point the game crashed hard, taking a couple of our saved games with it. Bruce's terrifying explanation: The Belgian AI had evolved into an entity capable of wreaking havoc in the real world, like Jason if he were real or the actual Belgium.

The lessons we drew from all of this: First, don't mess with Belgium. Second, don't mess with anyone, because Belgium will find out. This isn't advice you hear very often on the major news networks, so feel free to draw your own conclusions about possible media conspiracies.

HANDS-ON

Mini Duke Nukem

The proud *Duke* tradition is reduced to a side-scroller

By Jason "Chim-Chim" Brown

For those who pine for the days of pipe bombs and police pigs, *Duke Nukem: Manhattan Project* may be all you're going to get, as *Duke Nukem Forever* seems to be taking forever to finish. *Manhattan Project* is just a side scroller, but at least it is slick and entertaining.

Fragging is still the name of the game, with numerous goofy monsters to kill including Uzi toting alligators and mutant dominatrices with whips.

To its credit, *Manhattan Project* preserves much of *Duke*'s flavor. You'll hear plenty of wise-cracks, such as "rest in pieces" or "I go where I please, and I please where I go." And the requisite babes are back, proudly displaying their animated 3D attributes. (The game does bear an M rating.)

Manhattan Project should be in stores now for $20.

UPDATE

MOO3 Delayed

Design changes and departure of lead designer raise concerns among fans By Tom Chick

It's official: Quicksilver's *Master of Orion III* is running about a year behind schedule. According to CEO William Fisher, the delay is routine. "We've got all the pieces of the game talking to one another, but the user experience isn't right. It's ambitious and deep, but sometimes that results in things being hard to understand or hard to control." Fisher said in some cases the amount of detail lead to a "wall of noise" phenomenon.

Perhaps the most significant change is that they've dropped the concept of Imperial Focus Points, which the player would have spent to interact with his empire. According to Fisher, this interfered with the flow of gameplay. He hopes instead to build into the game a flexible background mechanism that encourages micromanagement in the early part of the game and turns these functions over to the AI as your empire grows. "What I hope to achieve," he says, "is a subtle set of rules that allows users to do whatever they want, with the caveat that extreme micromanagement will cause their galaxy to run less efficiently."

But more notable than the delay is the departure of lead designer Alan Emrich. Fisher and Emrich gave different explanations for Emrich's departure. Emrich says he left because he didn't want to be a burden to Quicksilver's budget now that Infogrames has cut off funding. But Fisher says that not only is Infogrames still funding development, they're also committing additional money to the project.

But both insist the departure was amicable and that Emrich will still serve as a consultant while the game is retooled. "I'm not a prima donna who says you have to do things my way," Emrich says. "So I understand that this is the time hard choices have to be made [about what's going to be in the game]. And for the most part, I'm okay with those decisions."

NEWS FEED

SWOTL Flies Again

LucasArts is reuniting with legendary designer Lawrence Holland to create a new game inspired by Holland's classic *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe* (1991). The new game, scheduled for late 2003, will feature air-to-air and air-to-ground World War II combat in the European theater and other territories. The game will be story-driven, according to LucasArts, putting players in a secret, elite squad of pilots who undertake the most dangerous missions of the war. Holland's company, Totally Games (*X-wing*, *TIE Fighter*), will develop the sim for both PC and consoles.

EXTENDED PLAY HOMEBREW

by Tom Chick

Money for Something

Homebrew usually focuses on the efforts of folks who give away their creations, but occasionally mods and games are created that are so good, the designers can't help but charge for them. This month I've focused on a couple that are definitely worthy of your attention, if not your money.

Bad Milk
■ $19.99
■ (www.dreamingmedia.com)

Mick and Ted Skolnick of Dreamingmedia took home the Seamus McNally Grand Prize at the 2002 Independent Games Festival for *Bad Milk*, the strangest game since *Bad Day on the Midway*. It unfortunately offers none of the length or replay value of that side-scroller, but it is quite an experience for the hour or so it takes to win. The premise? You've drunk some obscenely old milk and must find your way out of bed and into life (yours or another's).

After an opening scene reminiscent of *Being John Malkovich*, players use the mouse to spin screens full of odd pictures, clicking them to trigger puzzles and obtain clues. The low budget was actually used to good effect here, as many of the puzzles revolve around sound instead of fleshy graphics. It's pricey for what you get but absolutely unforgettable. Be sure to visit the site to check out the team's freebies, including a program that turns pictures into ASCII art, a thumb wrestling game, and some truly disturbing screensavers.

X-Plane 6.x
■ $70 (includes four new scenery CDs)
■ www.x-plane.com

If you're a flight sim fan and didn't take long, hard look at *X-Plane* version 5.x, don't make the same mistake with 6.x. Sporting better graphics, a refined flight model that handles helicopters and gyrocopters with ease, and enhanced plane and scenery creation tools, this is one of the best civilian flight sims on the market for those who like to tinker. Land-use data taken from government maps has just been added, so the sim now contains every highway, power line, and city on earth for easier VFR flights. If you just want to see what the new graphics engine and physics model are capable of, download the company's free mach cone sim, *Young's Modulus* (www.youngsmodulus.com).

HANDS-ON

Cinemaware Rides Again

"Digitally remastered" versions of their classic games coming soon By Robert Coffey

One of the true innovators during the earliest days of computer gaming Cinemaware released a series of games that blended seemingly disparate genres into great playing experiences. *It Came from the Desert* was a 1950s monster movie action-adventure game; *Defender of the Crown* mixed strategy with Robin Hood-style arcade action; and *Lords of the Rising Sun* found a way to combine role playing, arcade action, strategy, and 12th-century Japanese flavor. Fifteen years after their original releases, Cinemaware is about to re-release these games again in updated forms.

After some time playing almost-good builds of *Defender of the Crown* and *The Three Stooges*, I was intrigued—and bored. Bored by the butt-simple and not terribly engaging arcade gameplay of *The Three Stooges*, intrigued by the rudimentary but somehow still engaging strategy-heavy gameplay of *Defender of the Crown*. Both games have been "digitally remastered," meaning the graphics have been upgraded and the code has been revamped to run on today's machines. But the gameplay remains the same. In *Defender of the Crown*, you compete against AI opponents to unite and rule over medieval Britain, seizing territories on a *Risk*-style map, and occasionally engaging in basic arcade sequences of jousting and sword fighting. It's simple, but the AI is nice and aggressive and the lack of a save system works for the game, giving every strategic move weight and tension. If ever a game screamed "Play me on your laptop!" this is it. As for *The Three Stooges*, well, this kind of arcade offering is better off on a handheld (there is a GBA version available now).

Defender of the Crown's 15-year-old gameplay is rudimentary but somehow still engaging.

Some of these remastered games have already been released in Europe and should start hitting U.S. shelves by this fall. If the price is low, more than two or three should be worth the buy, especially favorites like *It Came from the Desert*, *Wings*, and *Rocket Ranger*.

GET A LIFE

Now and Exciting Ways to Withdraw From the World

Andy Richter Controls the Universe This mid-season comedy starring Conan's erst-while sidekick is wicked funny thanks to Richter's natural charm and fantasy sequences of talking kangaroo boxers, coworkers getting rammed headfirst into walls, and, of course, dead guys doing the hustle. Tuesdays on Fox.

Wilco's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* Reprise Records thought Wilco's brilliant sixth album was too weird to be released last September. Now *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* is finally on store shelves (for all the non-file-swappers out there) courtesy of a new label. If you like good solid American pop with plenty of roots rock sensibility, then pick it up.

The Big Questions of Our Time We're not talking about the Middle East here, we're talking Middle Earth. The *CGW* staff is debating which *Fellowship of the Ring* DVD set to buy. The two-disc set that's out in August? Or the three-disc set with 30 minutes of bonus footage in November? Get your own life by helping us get one as well.

The Comedy Genius of Henry Raddick Who would have thought some of the funniest stuff online was hiding in Amazon.com's reader reviews? Go to Amazon.com, click on Friends & Favorites, search for Henry Raddick, and then sit back and read his reviews of books, DVDs, cassette tapes, and more. Don't stop until you reach the gardening sign.

PIPELINE

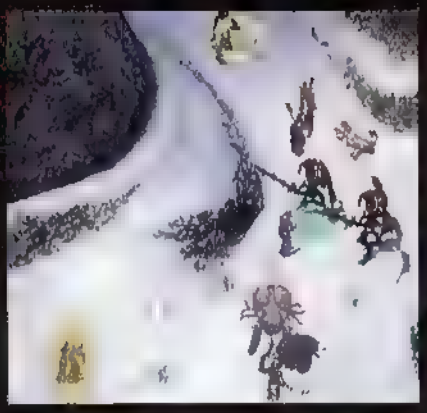
By Rich LaPorte

CGW often tells you how hard estimating software release dates is, but never explains why. I've spent the last four years tracking PC game release dates through my site Gone Gold, and I'm about to share with you what has taken me a lot of painstaking research to find out. It's the information publishing companies don't want you to have: How they come up with release dates and why they're so often wrong. The answer? Dice.

That's right. When you become a publisher, you are given a set of three dice. The first is a 12-sided die, the second is 31-sided, and the last die is six-sided. When the results from rolling these dice are combined, they can make up any date for the next six years. Anything past six years and developers are told to label it "When it's done."

So now you know. As you look at the following dates, just remember how they came about and remind yourself that they can change with the flick of a wrist. After checking them out here, stop by www.gonegold.com to see if any of these games has "Gone Gold" (been completed and sent off for duplication). After all, once the game is gold, the date they give us is on the money...give or take a few days, of course. Please send release date information to laporte@gonegold.com.

O.R.B. is finally getting close to hitting shelves.



Icewind Dale 2 is now looking like a July release.

Prisoner of War could see a September breakout.

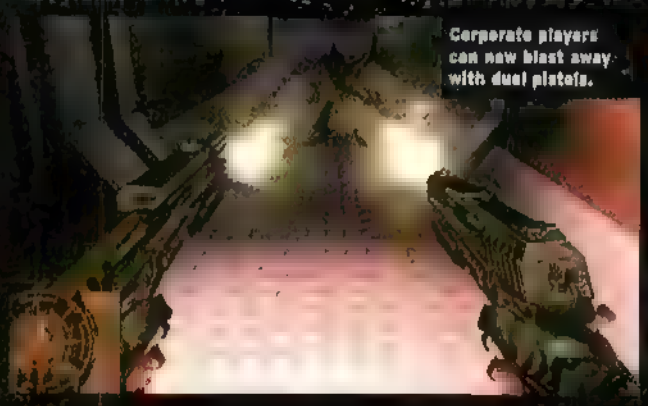
Age of Mythology	Microsoft	09/04/02
Age of Wonders II	G.O.D.	05/31/02
Aliens vs. Predator 2: Primal Hunt	Sierra	Q3 2002
Asheron's Call 2	Microsoft	Q4 2002
Battlefield 1942	EA	07/17/02
Bonestorm	Okaru	Q4 2002
Call of Cthulhu	FishTank	08/15/02
City of Heroes	NCsoft	Q3 2002
Combat Flight Simulator 3	Microsoft	Q3 2002
Combat Mission 2: Barbarossa to Berlin	Big Time	Q3 2002
Command & Conquer: Generals	EA	Q4 2002
Conflict: Desert Storm	SCi	Q4 2002
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	Sierra	08/15/02
Deus Ex 2	Eidos	Q4 2002
Doom III	id Software	TBA
Dragon's Lair 3D	Dragonstone	On Hold
Duke Nukem Forever	GOD Games	Q4 3002
Earth and Beyond	EA	Q2 2002
EverQuest: The Planes of Power	Sony	TBA
EverQuest II	Sony	Q3 2003
Final Fantasy XI	SquareSoft	TBA
Freelancer	Microsoft	Q2 2002
G.I. Combat	Strategy First	08/01/02
Gene	DreamCatcher	05/28/02
Gothic II	JoWood	Q4 2002
Grand Prix 4	Infogrames	08/22/02

Grand Theft Auto III	Take 2	05/22/02
Halo	Microsoft	Unknown
Harpoon 4	Ubi Soft	Q2 2002
Hidden & Dangerous 2	GOD Games	Q2 2002
Hitman 2	Eidos	09/16/02
Homeworld 2	Sierra	TBA
Icewind Dale II	Interplay	07/03/02
IGI2: Covert Strike	Codemasters	08/12/02
Imperium Galactica III	CDV	Q3 2002
Impossible Creatures	Microsoft	08/06/02
Indiana Jones	LucasArts	Q3 2002
Links 2003	Microsoft	Q3 2002
Lock-On	Ubi Soft	Q4 2002
Lords of the Realm III	Sierra	TBA
Madden NFL 2003	EA Sports	Q3 2002
MoHo	Take 2	07/19/02
Master of Orion III	Microprose	09/04/02
MechWarrior 4: Clan	Microsoft	07/26/02
MechWarrior 4: Inner Sphere	Microsoft	Q2 2002
Medieval: Total War	EA	09/04/02
NBA Live	EA Sports	Q3 2002
NHL 2003	EA Sports	Q3 2002
Neverwinter Nights	Infogrames	06/12/02
No One Lives Forever 2	Fox Interactive	TBA
O.R.B	Strategy First	06/19/02
Operation Flashpoint: Resistance	Codemasters	06/26/02
PlanetSide	Sony	Q4 2002
Pool Paradise	Eidos	Q3 2002
Prisoner of War	Codemasters	09/04/02

Project Nomads	CDV	Q3 2002
Quake IV	Activision	TBA
Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	Q3 2002
Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	Q2 2002
RollerCoaster Tycoon 2	Infogrames	Q3 2002
Shadowbane	UbiSoft	Q2 2002
SimCity 4	EA	Q4 2002
Sims Online	EA	Q3 2002
Soldier of Fortune 2: Double Helix	Activision	05/22/02
Sovereign	Sony	Q2 2002
Star Trek: Starfleet Command III	Activision	Q4 2002
Star Trek: Elite Force II	Ritual Entertainment	Q1 2003
Star Wars: Galaxies	LucasArts	Q4 2002
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	Q3 2003
Sum of All Fears	Ubi Soft	06/14/02
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	09/18/02
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	TBA
The Thing	Universal Interactive	08/14/02
Thief III	Eidos	Q4 2002
Tron 2.0	Monolith	TBA
Unreal II	Infogrames	09/04/02
Unreal Tournament 2003	Infogrames	06/19/02
WarBirds 3	Simon/Schuster	09/03/02
WarCraft III	Blizzard	06/28/02
Warlords IV	SSG	Q3 2002
World of Warcraft	Blizzard	Unknown
World War II	Codemasters	Q3 2002

NEW UPDATE

Aliens tend to swarm, so be thankful that the Weyland-Yutani Corporation outfits its agents with 360-degree motion trackers.



Corporate players can now blast away with dual pistols.

You'll want to attack this massive bull-like beast from afar.

ALIENS VS. PREDATOR 2: PRIMAL HUNT

More chest-bursting mayhem come summer By Thierry Nguyen

The monster here mimics the background behind it and waits for you to get close before striking.

The new levels have a hybrid Alien-Predator look to them. Note the big artifact housing chamber near the back.

Predators now have a faster weapon for popping aliens—the energy flechette.

Predator cloaking will be more accurate, but Aliens will still be able to sniff out Predators by pheromones.

How do you top a gaming moment such as busting your little Alien head out of some poor schmuck's stomach in *Aliens vs. Predator 2*? By busting out from one of those high-and-mighty Predator types, that's how. And that's what Third Law Interactive is gonna let you do. Plus, you'll get to play the Predalien, run around as a slimy Corporate, and self-destruct as a Predator.

You can now pick up and deploy your own sentry guns (à la *Aliens Director's Cut*).

Why Third Law? Monolith is busy with *NOLF 2*, so Fox Interactive went to Third Law because of their familiarity with the LithTech engine (which is what *KISS: Psycho Circus* was built on) and their ability to quickly develop a solid, clean game.

A lot of *AVP2: Primal Hunt* is intended to balance and flesh out the already-superb *AVP2*. *Primal Hunt* takes place in two plot segments. The first portion occurs 500 years before the events in *AVP2*; the second section happens a few weeks before the beginning of *AVP2*—consider *Primal Hunt* the prologue to the original game. Each species has three missions, and the gameplay all takes place on the Zeta site that is frequently referred to in *AVP2*'s storyline. After you've finished the story, you can jump into the four new multiplayer levels.

Humans are getting the most modifications, including the 360-degree motion tracker and three new toys. Also, you'll be able to pick up and deploy your own sentry guns (à la *Aliens Director's Cut*), and the guns will keep firing until they overheat, run out of ammo, or get destroyed. Fixed turrets are another benefit for humans; scattered throughout levels, turrets can provide good support for choke points in multiplayer or break up the action in single player. Associate producer Paul Pawlicki comments, "[It's] a lot like the first mission in *NOLF*, where you had to jump between the different windows to hit your targets. You'll need to hop between different turrets in order to hold ground against an incoming horde of Aliens."

In *AVP2* multiplayer, the Corporates and the Marines were identical, but Pawlicki says, "We're considering balancing the two Humans out by letting the Corporates keep the 360-degree motion tracker; however, only the Marines have access to the more powerful guns." The Corporates should still be able to hold their own—the dual pistol is punchy in its own right.

Predators will have a rapid-fire cannon to augment their slow but powerful shoulder cannon. Their cloak has been tweaked, so they actually display the shimmering surface effect seen in the movies. Also, they finally will have the ability to self-destruct, but only in multiplayer. So if your health drops below 20 percent, you could just start laughing and pressed to take out everyone in the room with you. Of course, if you hear laughter, run.

The Aliens will remain mostly the same, though there is the option of playing a Predalien hybrid in single player. Then again, the Aliens are pretty bad-ass as is.

The Predator campaign takes place 500 years before *AVP2*, so the developers created wildlife for the early planet. There will be three new critters: a raging bull-thing, a sneaky chameleonesque sloth, and an even sneakier worm-beast (think *Dune*). Level design shows a mix of organic-looking flora and high-tech Predator architecture. There's a key artifact in that campaign, and when you first see it, it's housed in Alien-style architecture.

Cut to 500 years later, when *AVP2* takes place, and the scenery is now a weird cross between Predator style (seen briefly in *Predator 2*) and the goopy Alien look.

So far, *AVP2: Primal Hunt* looks like it will do the franchise justice. Gearbox showed that they could take the reins and make a good expansion pack, and Third Law looks like they can do the same. Would you pass up the chance to chew through a Predator's ribcage?

GAME STATS

GENRE: Action
RELEASE DATE: June 2002
PUBLISHER: Fox Interactive
DEVELOPER: Third Law Interactive
CONTACT: www.fox-interactive.com

We still don't know what these things are or
How about three-eyed, monkey-faced, chicke
winged scramblers?

STAR TREK: EL

Set phasers to fun! (Okay, somebody kill me now) By Tom Price

TE FORCE II

I'm about to state something that I never thought I would. One sentence, 10 words, that I never imagined would be written or uttered by me. And yet here I am, forced not only to say it, but to say it and mean it. Here goes: I'm really looking forward to the new *Star Trek* game.

I hate *Star Trek*. With a fricking passion. You can imagine how hard it was for me when *Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force* was released in 2000 and I discovered that it was really good and that I really liked it. I was stunned, but its solid and compelling (if painfully short) single-player game was a revelation for a first-person shooter fan like myself. It also had the distinction of being the first really good game built on the *Quake III* engine. Admitting I liked it wasn't easy.

So I met Activision's announcement of the development of *Star Trek: Elite Force II* by Ritual Entertainment (the people who brought you *Heavy Metal: F.A.K.K. 2*) with some alarm. The small glimpse we've gotten so far suggests that the game will be as good as, if not better than, its predecessor. That's a problem—I really don't want to have to admit to liking two *Star Trek* games in one lifetime.

The *Voyager* name has been removed from this game because that ship will not be involved. *Elite Force II* takes place right after the series finale of *Voyager*. You again play the role of Hazard Team chief Alex Munro. You return to Earth and after a short stint at Starfleet Academy, you and your team will embark upon the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC 1701-E under the command of none other than Jean-Luc Picard.

From there, the game should play out similarly to *Elite Force*, but with a couple of significant differences. For one, levels will take place in more open spaces. That means more planetside time for you and your Red Shirts. If things go according to plan, team AI will be much improved over the previous game. You'll have some new and better weapons to give team members, as well as a beefed-up tricorder that will give you all kinds of nifty battlefield info.

The plot has also seen some big changes. Instead of being purely linear, the story will branch out at key points. You'll have certain choices when it comes to how you pass through an area or beat an enemy, and losing teammates will also have an effect on future developments.

The regular baddies will be back—Romulans, Klingons, Borg, what-have-you. Plus there will be two new, mysterious races. *CGW* will get you more info as it becomes available.

Multiplayer will include all the modes and features found in the *Elite Force* expansion pack, with a few new twists. For instance, you'll now be able to use the Klingon Bat'Leth for some good old-fashioned melee battling. Modes include holomatch (deathmatch to non-Trekkies out there), capture-the-flag, and team holomatch.

My big hope is that the game will turn out to be longer than the ridiculously short *Elite Force*. Ritual has promised that the levels will be bigger and more involved. That's good, because if I'm going to admit I like yet another *Trek* game, it had better suck up enough of my time to make a dent in a month's worth of deadlines—or someone needs to hook me up with a working phaser. That would be sweet.

That is one big, bad-ass Borg—an advanced Borg drone, to be exact.

Die, Romulan scum!

These red shirts were bad fuck, so we ditched 'em.

GAME STATS

GENRE: Strategy
RELEASE DATE: Q2 2002
PUBLISHER: Elidos
DEVELOPER: Elixir Studios
CONTACT: www.elixir-studios.co.uk

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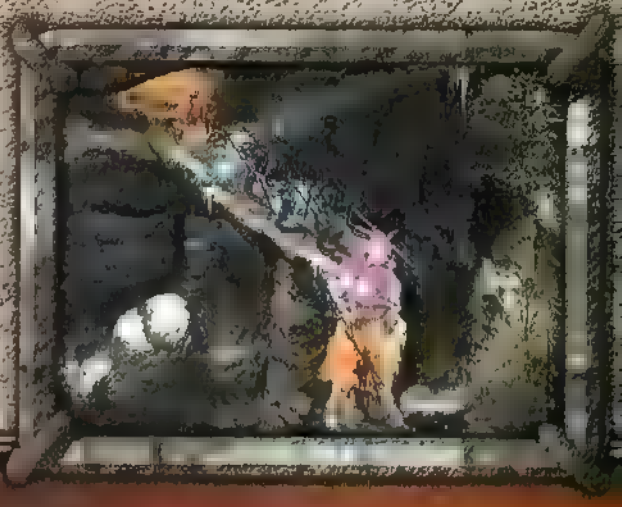

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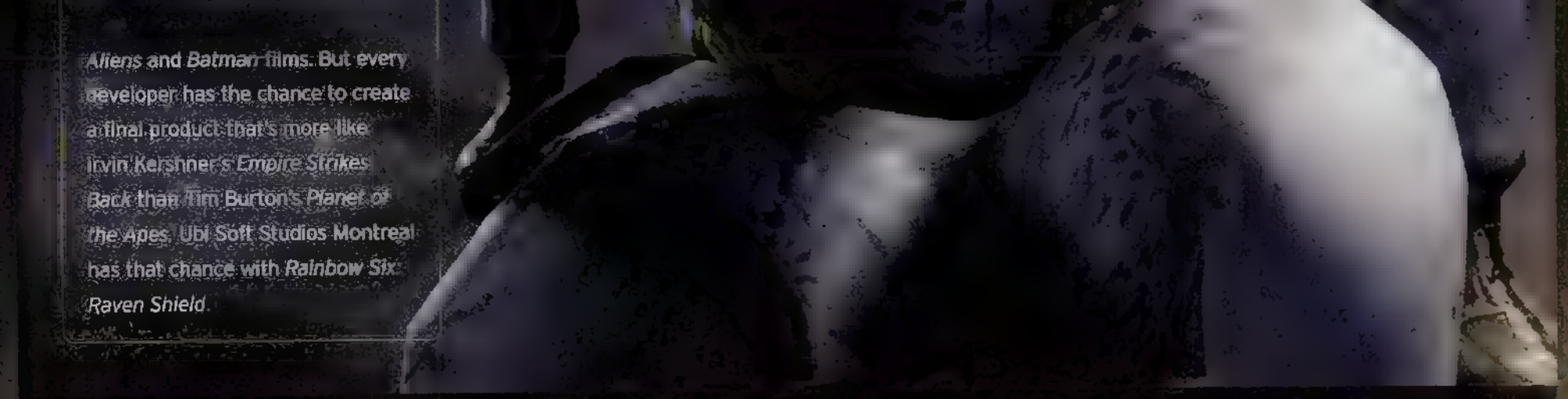
A NEW VISION FOR
THE FATHER OF TACTICAL SIMS

Let's get this out of the way for the fanboys. Red Storm is not doing the next *Rainbow Six* game. But don't go thinking that Ubi Soft was a Big Bad Publisher and took *Rainbow Six* away from Red Storm; it was Red Storm's decision from the very beginning. Once they had finished *Rogue Spear* and started on *Ghost Recon*, Red Storm wanted to let other developers play in their universe. It's true that many franchises go south when a new entity takes over—look at what happened to the



Aliens and *Batman* films. But every developer has the chance to create a final product that's more like Irvin Kershner's *Empire Strikes Back* than Tim Burton's *Planet of the Apes*. Ubi Soft Studios Montreal has that chance with *Rainbow Six: Raven Shield*.

TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD

PUBLISHER: UBI SOFT DEVELOPER: UBI SOFT STUDIOS MONTREAL
GENRE: TACTICAL SIMULATOR
URL: WWW.RAVEN-SHIELD.COM
RELEASE DATE: Q4 2002

By Thierry Nguyen

Here I am brandishing my gun while my guys cover each other as the last operative comes down the ladder.

A glance at Ubi Soft Montreal's resume shows a lot of console games. This is the same studio that made *Batman: Vengeance*, *Monaco Grand Prix Racing*, and *Tarzan Untamed*. Their PC credits lie solely in *Speed Buster*, *Hype the Time Quest*, and the *Black Thorn* mission pack for *Rogue Spear*. Why should we give these console-game developing Canucks a chance? Because they have great resources at their disposal, and they have the passion and drive to create a unique game that still lives up to *Rainbow Six* standards. The team is helped by lead designer and sim veteran Mike McCoy, from the Interactive Magic days, with Mike Grasso (SWAT, former SEAL) acting as technical advisor and Red Storm also providing consultation. The developers even got some preliminary training with the GTI (Canada's version of SWAT) in order to get the special ops mentality.

After playing through some of the missions, I walked away feeling that *Raven Shield* has enough of the trappings of the previous *Rainbow Six* games to appease *Rainbow* diehards, yet it's accessible to people who don't know a GALIL from a Mac-11/9.

UNREAL REALISM

The biggest change from past games in the series is that *Raven Shield* uses the *Unreal II* engine. Producer Mathieu Ferland cited the *Unreal II* engine's proven technology in networking, AI scripting, and visuals as the primary reasons for switching to it. Like other developers using this engine, Ubi Soft had been using interim builds sent by Epic for a while, before making enough modifications to operate it autonomously. "At first, we bombarded [Epic] with so many questions, but as development went on, we figured everything else on our own," said Ferland. The *Unreal* Developer Network was also a valuable resource in honing the engine for *Raven Shield*. Having 13 programmers on the team didn't hurt, either.

The visual differences are most striking in the character models. Evolved from the simpler models of the *Rogue Spear* days, these characters use the full power of the *Unreal* engine. It's downright creepy to look back at a friendly Team Rainbow operative and see his eyes blinking behind his goggles. All the gear on uniforms is now authentic, in both appearance and placement. Even the way operatives hold their guns is more realistic this time (thanks to hands-on research with Airsoft replicas of most of the guns). Also, the lighting gives one of the most realistic night-vision effects seen in a game. Other advantages of the *Unreal* engine can be seen in features ranging from the realistic movement animations to the weather system for some of the missions.

Another side effect of the new engine is the first-person weapons view. For the first time in the *Rainbow* franchise, you actually see the gun in your hands, rather than a mere reticle. Finally, movement and shooting are no longer abstractions--you actually see where the heck you're aiming. So not only do other operatives hold their guns realistically, but you do, too. In fact, everything from the stock to the ammo magazine is rendered accurately, thanks to the *Unreal* engine and modern computer horsepower.

IT'S CREEPY TO LOOK BACK AT A FRIENDLY TEAM RAINBOW OPERATIVE AND SEE HIS EYES BLINKING BEHIND HIS GOGGLES.

One of the steps the developers have taken to ensure accuracy is to record actual gunfire sounds. Rather than depend on an artist with a repertoire of gunlike noises, the developers contracted a special effects firm to load a secluded

Finally: realistic night vision—great for low-light conditions, painful when you're near a bright light source.

area with microphones at all sorts of angles, and shoot guns. Three days of extensive shooting made up the gun sounds library, so firing is both visually and aurally accurate.

GO, ACTION, GO!

The biggest change, besides the first-person weaponry, is the new circumstantial-action menu. Similar to *SWAT 3*, *Raven Shield* lets you give your team orders on the fly. All you have to do is hold down the spacebar and a giant circle appears onscreen with different options. Then you just use the mouse wheel to cycle through the various options (such as Open & Clear or Open, Grenade, & Clear), and left-click to execute. This flexible circle-of-command is much easier to use than the ugly menu system that would pop up when you hit the U key in *Rogue Spear*.

In fact, it was so easy to use, that for most of my playing session, I acted more as a squad commander than an operative, preferring to lead my team and have them open and clear entry points for me. Another thing I could do was assign and execute Zulu codes. If I selected Open & Clear on the circular menu, but *right*-clicked instead of left-clicked, that told the team to Open & Clear on Zulu. I could then switch around and assign different Zulu codes to the other teams, and have everyone execute their orders simultaneously by pressing the Zulu code key. It was easy to coordinate simultaneous entries.

This ease of command on the field represents a deliberate shift in the game's focus to on-the-fly tactics rather than on carefully laid plans. Sure, the planning process will be mostly the same—players can either load up a default plan or muck around and formulate their own. But rather than die in a mission and go back to tweaking the plan, in *Raven Shield* you can just restart the mission and alter your tactics in-game.

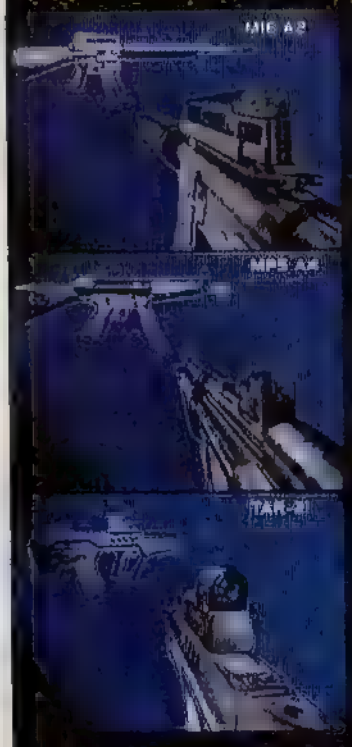
The interface is a lot more streamlined. Most of your control lies in a few keyboard keys, the mouse, and the spacebar for circumstantial actions. Just pointing the reticle toward the ground and pressing the spacebar tells the other three operatives to move to that spot and provide cover. The mouse wheel is good for more than just selecting commands—it's also key to looking around. For example, you can use it to slowly swing doors open and slide windows up by simply aiming the reticle and rolling the wheel. No more whipping open doors and losing the advantage of surprise.

You also have a choice between default or variable lean. There are two default lean settings, left or right, but you can also hold the Ctrl key and move your mouse to control your head and its lean; you can use the mouse to take a "lurkey-look" around a corner. *Raven Shield* also introduces the prone position, so you and your team can be even stealthier when sinking through a mission. And finally, *Raven Shield* gives us the fast ladder slide. Rather than wait for your pokey self to slide down the ladder and be torn apart by terrorist gunplay, you can get on a ladder and instantly slide down—and you're still able to turn around and plug any fools you run into.

HARVARD-EDUCATED THUGS

The superb *Unreal* AI has been tweaked in order to create realistic operatives and terrorists—how can you expect to alter mission tactics or lead an efficient squad if the friendly AI is prone to getting stuck on walls or shooting blindly at nothing? Watching my operatives in action allayed all fears about unreliable AI. They constantly swept defined arcs as the unit moved forward. When I led the charge, one agent swept left, another swept right, and the last covered the 180 degree area behind us. Whenever I entered the room or gave them the order to clear, they would deploy in the appropriate position outside, breach the entry, and then immediately run in and fan out, making sure to cover all angles. The last

BIG TOM'S GUNS 'N' AMMO



Printing the complete weapon list would be too immense a task, considering there are about 80 core weapons, each with the capacity for multiple accessories (scope, silencers, muzzle brakes, and even extra-high-capacity, 100-round magazines) to bring the total to about 150 weapons. Here's a list of the new ones introduced in *Raven Shield*.

PISTOLS (only these can be used as secondary weapons)
Ingram Mac-11/9 MP (Mac-11/9 9mm machine pistol)
IMI Micro-Uzi MP (Micro-Uzi 9mm machine pistol)
SR-2 MP (SR-2 9mm machine pistol)

SUBMACHINE GUNS
IMI MTAR-21 Micro Tavor (MTAR-21 9mm submachine gun)
Ingram Mac-11/9 (Mac-11/9 9mm submachine gun)
IMI Micro-Uzi (Micro-Uzi 9mm submachine gun)
SR-2 (SR-2 9mm submachine gun)

SHOTGUN
USAS-12 (USAS-12 12g shotgun)

ASSAULT RIFLES
IMI TAR-21 (TAR-21 5.56mm assault rifle)
QBZ Type 95 Bullpup (Type 95 5.56mm assault rifle)

SNIPER RIFLE
VSS Vintorez (VSS Vintorez 9x39mm sniper rifle)

MACHINE GUN
HK 23E (23E 5.56mm machine gun)

This snow level feels more immersive than similar areas in past *Rainbow* games.

Again, thanks to the *Unreal II* engine, operatives look more distinct and properly outfitted.

HOSTAGES AND OPERATIVES HAVE "GET OUT OF THE WAY" AI—THEY WON'T BLOCK YOUR PATH. FINALLY.

time I had such a smooth experience was while playing with actual people. Furthermore, the developers have you controlling three teams in a mission instead of four, so you focus more on using the entire mission roster and don't get stuck with a throwaway fourth team as in the previous games. Needing all team members means you can't treat some of them as mere extra lives.

The terrorists' AI is no slouch, either. They patrol defined areas, investigate disturbances, and even keep hostages in line. Yes, if a hostage is found roaming, the terrorist will actually threaten the hostage and get him back in line. Additionally, you can now bind surrendered terrorists. Before, the terrorists just sat around after surrendering, and most players ended up executing them in cold blood. "*Rainbow* is a policing sim after all; we're now giving players a more moral choice for subduing enemies," said McCoy. Okay, so being able to handcuff a terrorist seems like a minor change, but at least it offers squeamish players an option other than execution.

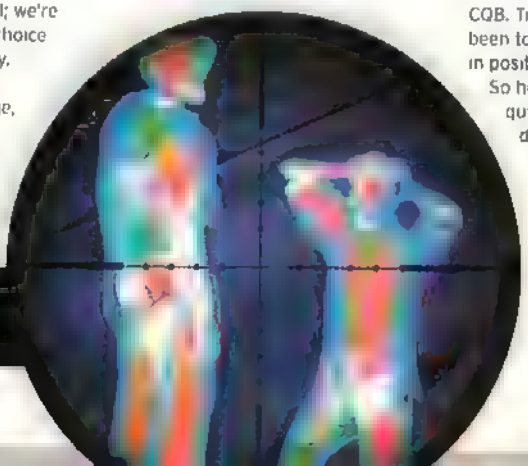
Hostages now do a bit more than flail about like decapitated chickens. They actively take cover when gunfire is present and will follow the player at the whim of the circumstantial-action key. You no longer have to put your team into Escort mode; you just tell a hostage whether you want him to follow, and he'll intelligently tag along if so. Both hostages and operatives have "get out of the way" AI—if you want to go somewhere, they won't stupidly block your path. Finally.

NEW TOYS FOR OLD TASKS

The heartbeat sensor has been toned down to improve balance and realism. Instead of seeing heartbeats on a map (in fact, you can't even call up the map when using the sensor), what you see now is a circular pulse in-game. All pulses are the same shape and size, and they indicate only their source. You can't tell if the heartbeat belongs to a terrorist or a hostage, or whether they're in the next room or three rooms over. All you know is that people are around. For a more in-depth look, you need thermal goggles.

The introduction of thermal goggles presented some interesting gameplay balance issues, which the development team has worked out. At first, the goggles illuminated the heat signature of everything, but it's pretty unfair to be able to see everyone through walls with impunity. To even things out, the team gave thermal goggles limited visibility and allowed only snipers to equip them, which has the added effect of making snipers useful for the rest of the mission.

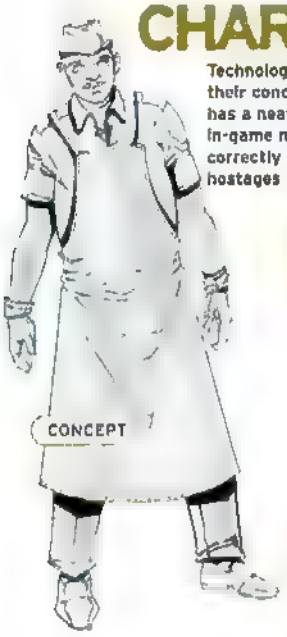
Like previous games, *Raven Shield* focuses on close-quarters combat, or CQB. Traditionally the job of sniper has been to watch a vantage point and stay in position for the whole of the mission. So he was useful in the beginning but quickly became a useless sitting duck. Now, the sniper can carry thermal goggles and become an advanced recon unit, able to see through the walls and map out nearby targets. Heck, give the sniper a Mac-11 for backup, and he can certainly hold his own in CQB and he provides tactical data. His versatility means he's valuable as both

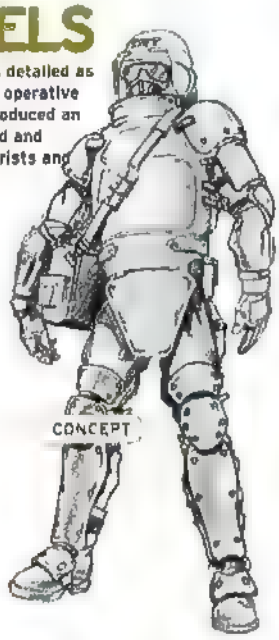


With thermal goggles that let them see through walls, snipers can now provide long-range support and tactical intelligence.

CHARACTER MODELS

Technology has helped the final characters look as detailed as their concepts. The concept drawing for the heavy operative has a neat-looking helmet, but further research produced an in-game model that has a more realistic face shield and correctly placed gear. A little Easter egg tip: Terrorists and hostages will sport the developers' faces.





ong-range support and CQB operative. This is another example of how Ub. Soft Montreal wants players to change tactics during the game, rather than play only accord ng to a plan.

AROUND THE WORLD IN 15 MISSIONS

When I finally started playing, all of these elements fell into place. *Raven Shield*'s plot follows the fam liar formula of "seem ngly unrelated terrorist incidents converging into a central überplot." *Rogue Spear* took its title from the U.S. Navy's code phrase for a lost nuclear weapon, but when I asked what "*Raven Shield*" referred to, I was told, "Play the game and find out." I got to romp around four missions: two sequential ones taking place in the mountains near Lamoura, Switzerland; a plot-critical mission in an import-export facility in Porto de Alaegre, Brazil; and a tense hostage situation at a London bank.

The Switzerland and Brazil missions were good examples of the *Unreal II* engine's ability to model realistic terrain. Chasing the terrorists through the mountains had me fighting at night while it was snowing. The mountain highway mission that loads right after the alpine mission meant chasing them down a highway and facing them in a standoff at a tunnel. The scene was complete with smoke and pyrotechnics. The import-export facility showed off varied, colorful outdoor and urban level design, with lush trees and bushes sharing space with dinged-up cars and buildings with chipped walls and missing roofs.

The bank mission was the most tense, due to the many hostages and the way the map was laid out. Initially, I stormed my team into the side entrances and got taken out in short order. The second time around, I noticed that one of the terrorists had taken over a security station, which had a convenient street-facing window. I was able to get an operative on top of a nearby bus and snipe the security office, leaving the terrorists mostly in the dark as to my whereabouts inside the bank. Also, one of the terrorists was smart enough to hide behind bullet proof glass, so I had to find an alternative way to breach his room and take him out. Making use of heartbeat sensors and thermal goggles, I took my time and figured out how to assault the big bank vault that was br.mming with thugs and hostages below.

The game impressed me. I was easily able to control my team, and seeing the new guns, gadgets, and *Unreal II*-generated backdrops made me think that *Raven Shield* just might attain one of the Holy Grails of gaming: the hard-core game that is accessible to newbies. The *Rainbow* franchise was always one that I respected but could never get into. And I was skeptical of the idea of a non-Red Storm *Rainbow* game, but after hearing the developer's fresh take on the series and actually playing the game, I'm conf dent that it will satisly the hardcore faithful, while turning more players into *Rainbow* addicts.

RAVEN SHIELD JUST MIGHT BE THE HARDCORE GAME THAT IS ACCESSIBLE TO NEWBIES.

One of the multiplayer levels takes place in this prison. Also, for diehard *Rainbow* fans out there, there will be a new, optimized version of the City Street map.

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EVERYONE

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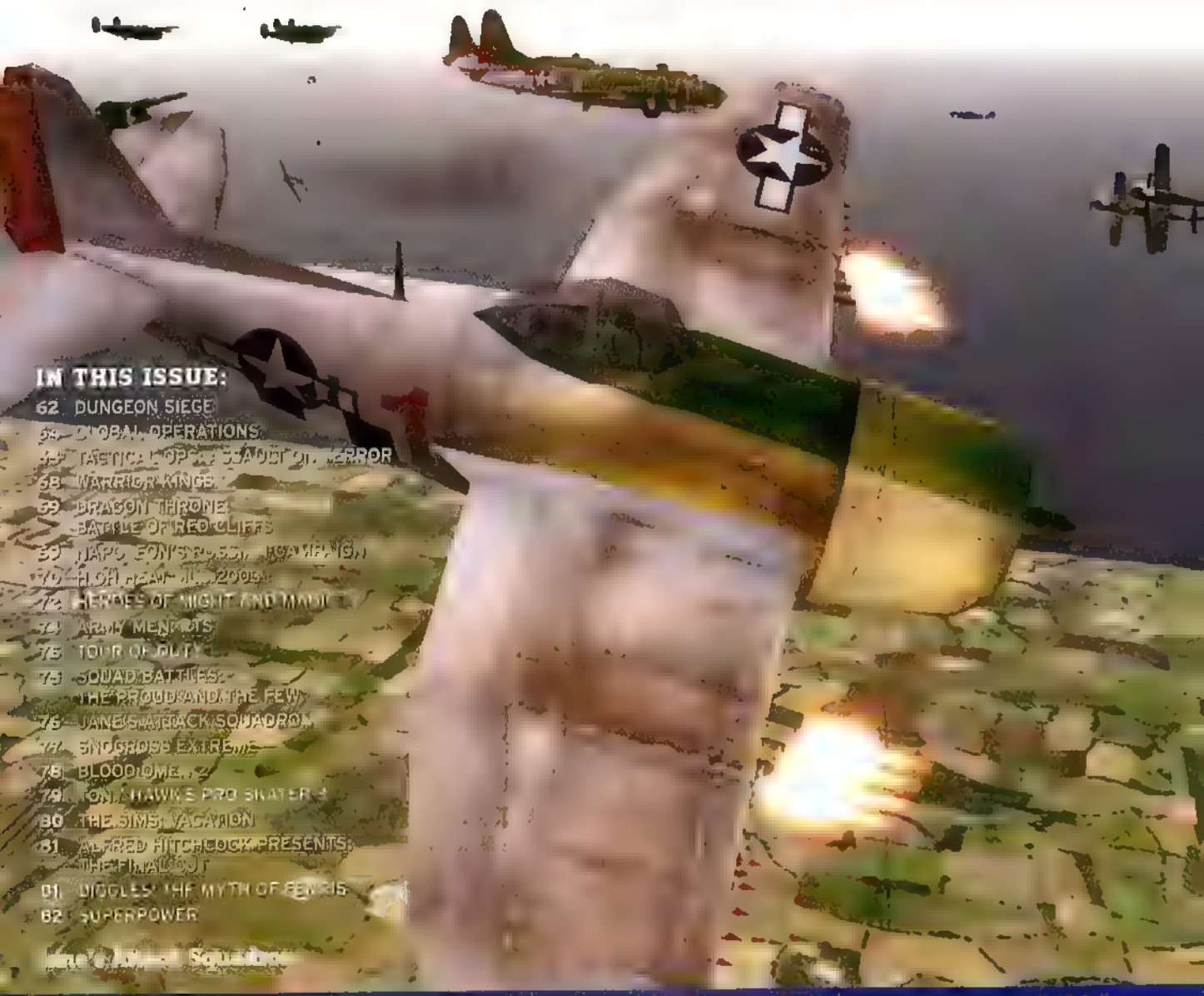
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Animated Violence

Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey



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How Do We Rate?

We review only finished games—no betas, no patches

★★★★★ **OUTSTANDING** The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience.

★★★★☆ **VERY GOOD** Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.

★★★☆☆ **AVERAGE** Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.

★★☆☆☆ **WEAK** Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.

★☆☆☆☆ **ABYSMAL** The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.

Thanks to frequent bottlenecks and brutal war machines, fighting your way through the caverns of the mad goblin inventor is one of the toughest parts of the game.

Dungeon Siege

Will it make you forget *Diablo II*? By Robert Coffey

PUBLISHER Microsoft
DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games GENRE Action/RPG
URL www.microsoft.com/games/dungeonsiege
ESRB RATING Teen; blood, violence PRICE $49.95

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 333, 128MB RAM, 1GB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium III, 256MB RAM MULTIPLAYER LAN, Internet (2-8 players)

Let's get right to it: Is *Dungeon Siege* human kind's long-promised *Diablo* killer? Probably not, but that doesn't mean everybody's favorite demon hasn't been bruised, bloodied, and generally bludgeoned by this incredibly addictive game. *Dungeon Siege* is a beautifully crafted, engaging battle from start to finish, every pixel shimmering with the care and devotion lavished on it by Chris Taylor and Gas Powered Games.

The main reason *Diablo* isn't flat-out dead is this: *Dungeon Siege* is a very different game. On the surface its "third-person dungeon crawling through an irrelevant story/click on a monster till its dead/reap rewards and repeat" gameplay would seem to mark it a blatant *Diablo* clone. But it isn't. Instead of guiding one character, you can command a party of up to eight. That difference alone allows for several unique aspects in the gameplay. For one thing, it lets you do more of all the noncombat stuff that's still fun. Instead of making increasingly infrequent either/or decisions during the course of the game, as in *Diablo II*, you're almost constantly twiddling with character attributes. Multiple characters also mean you get to use exponentially more cool loot and weapons. And unlike *Diablo II*, *Dungeon Siege* has you finding or buying great stuff all the way through the game—you won't be using the same sword from the middle of the game to the end.

Granted, early on when it's one against all, *Dungeon Siege* is very much like the *Diablo* games. But even then, there are differences. The streamlined, use-based character development system actually responds to how you play, letting you craft your own experience from the moment you first swing a rusty shovel at an attacking Krug. The more you bash monsters, the higher your strength and melee abilities go. Keep firing off arrows and your dexterity and ranged combat numbers increase, use more spells and you'll see increases in your intelligence rating and whichever of the two schools of magic you lean on more.

Some players might complain that this system limits you to only four character types: fighter, archer, nature mage, or combat mage. Fair enough, but the system offers a lot of possibilities. You can, for example, create a mage with

It's remarkably involving, challenging players without overwhelming them.

The skeletal soul of a slain swamp witch rises from the battle below.

Late in the game, every battle is an orgy of spectacular lighting effects.

enough strength to wear cool armor and swing a vicious battleaxe—you can't do that with *Diablo II*'s more restrictive character classes. You can even reshape and transform the NPCs that join you.

After you collect that first extra party member, combat begins to undergo a sea change. Instead of amounting to manic clickfests, your clashes with the hundreds of monsters in *Dungeon Siege* require tactical thinking. You can pause and issue orders, which is perfect for prioritizing targets, reorganizing formations, and moving your party to take advantage of higher ground. It's almost like playing an RTS as you struggle to get the most out of your forces while facing the combined arms (and claws and fangs and fireballs) of the soulless hordes assaulting you. It's remarkably involving, challenging players without overwhelming them. And every skirmish is just beautiful.

The game engine is a muscular marvel, consistently churning out the sort of graphics that make you pause the game just to ogle. Cobwebbed crypts, misty swamps, snowy mountaintops, and incredibly lush forests are just a few of the spectacular locations in the game. The monsters are equally eye-catching, and for the most part they eschew the "same creature, different color" formula at work through much of *Diablo II*. That's apt when you consider that most monsters seem inextricably linked to their environments, simultaneously creating a more believable gameworld and allowing monsters to use camouflage to their advantage.

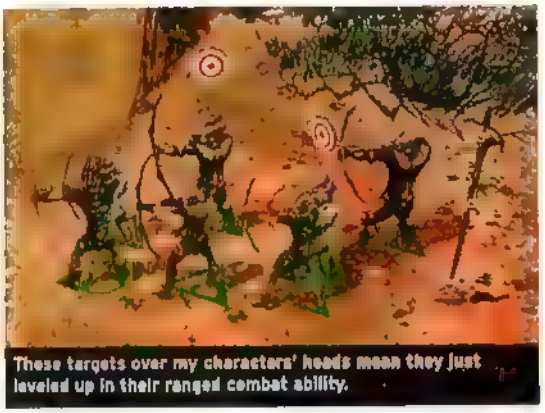
If there's a knock against *Dungeon Siege*, it's that it lacks a kind of oomph of personality to set it apart, something *Diablo II* had going for it in spades. The monsters are fierce, but lack the scary sounds and animations of the Blizzard games. The cut-scenes aren't bad, but they're flat compared to the animated operas of *Diablo II*.

But in the big picture, these are quibbles. *Dungeon Siege* is easily one of the best, most enjoyable games of the year. In what is shaping up as a banner year for PC gaming, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the unquestionable must-haves.

VERDICT ★★★★½

There's so much that's good here, all we can say is this: Go play *Dungeon Siege*. Now.

Two rock monsters unleash a barrage of boulders.


These targets over my characters' heads mean they just leveled up in their ranged combat ability.

PAVING THE WAY

***Dungeon Siege* is as much a triumph of interface and ease of use as of gameplay. Here are the no-brainer innovations that every RPG developer is going to be expected to implement in future games.**

1. No poison spiders, no poison traps, no poison arrows—no poison, period.

2. You can immediately return items at stores for their full value instead of losing most of your money on a bad purchase.

3. No need to burn mana or money on identifying objects—if you find it, you know what it is and can use it right away.

4. Potion-sipping lets you replace 85, 80, or 27 points of health or mana without wasting an entire 100-point potion.

5. A single hotkey that says "Pick up all items" so you don't have to click on every friggin' little pile of gold after a big fight.

6. No load times when you enter new areas.

7. Hotkeys let you quickly toggle between user-set weapon and party configs so you can respond and react to the changing dynamics of a battle.

8. No arrows. If you've got a bow, then you can shoot the damn thing.

9. A greatly expanded item stash thanks to the pack mules you can hire. Now you can finally save up enough salable items to purchase that +300 Golden Armor of Ass-Kicking.

There's something very *Black Hawk Down* about this level. I mean that as a compliment.

Man, what a terrible way to die.

Each level has a different crew to choose from.

Global Operations

Return to your *Counter-Strike*, folks, nothing to see here By Tom Price

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts/Crave
DEVELOPER Barking Dog
GENRE Tactical sim
URL www.globalopsgame.com
ESRB RATING Mature; blood, violence
PRICE $39.99

REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 800, 128MB RAM, 800MB hard drive space, 16MB 3D video card RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM, 32MB video card
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LAN, Internet (2-24 players)

Let's be honest. When it comes to online tactical sims, *Counter-Strike* is the 400-pound gorilla of the genre. Everyone developing similar games hopes theirs will unseat it and become the online addiction du jour. There are two ways a game could do this: by outright copying *CS* (see *Tac Ops* review on the opposite page) or by taking the original formula and trying to improve upon it. *Global Operations* falls into the second category, but a litany of nagging problems prevents the game from seeing its vision through.

Global Ops consists of 13 levels and two campaigns, one from the good guys' side and one from the bad guys'. Each mission takes place in a different locale with its own counterterrorist and terrorist skins. At times the skins can get a little confusing, especially during missions in which both sides are wearing military-like uniforms. I had a hard enough time learning the eight uniforms in *CS*; trying to keep 26 uniforms straight is horrible. Plus, *Global Ops* features six character classes—demolitionist, machine gunner commando, recon, medic, and sniper—that all have unique characteristics and skills.

Missions play out in typical tac sim style, with objectives ranging from hostage rescue to bomb planting and defusing. There are a few interesting twists to the missions. For instance, in the Quebec mission, both sides are trying to get a hostage to an extraction point that's near the other team's spawn point. The back-and-forth dynamic turns the level into a football game with assault rifles. The maps are hit and miss. Some are bland and boring, and others are way too large and convoluted. However, a couple of them (like those for Colombia and Antarctica) border on the sublime, artistically.

The weapon load-out screen offers a lot of customization options and is very well arranged.

The good things about *Global Ops* are very good. There are loads of sexy weapons for which you can buy bolt-on enhancements like scopes and silencers. The 3D weapon models look fantastic in your hands, and actions, like switching the firing mode and kickback, are realistically modeled. However, there is a serious problem with weapon balancing. Too many times I was killed from across the map with a single shotgun blast or two hits from a pistol, while it would take me three or four shots from a sniper rifle to take an enemy down.

Global Ops is really meant to be a multiplayer game, but it also has a single-player component. However, if you were going to buy this game for its single player, don't. The AI, for both team and enemy, is absolutely atrocious. And if you were going to buy this game for multiplayer, you might want to wait a bit. The state of the netcode at the game's launch was extremely bad. Bad lag is a hallmark of the LithTech engine, but the first patch did improve it a bit.

I can't help but think that *Global Operations* will someday mature into a pretty good online shooter. But for now, I really can't recommend that people go out and buy it.

Global Operations' litany of nagging problems prevents it from seeing its vision through.

VERDICT ★★★☆☆
A noble effort to create the next big online thing falls short.

Tactical Ops: Assault on Terror

I've played *Counter-Strike*. *Counter-Strike* is a friend of mine. You, sir, are no *Counter-Strike* By Tom Price

PUBLISHER Infogrames/Microprose
DEVELOPER Kamehan
GENRE Action
URL www.infogrames.com
ESRB RATING Mature
PRICE $29.99

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 200, 64MB RAM, 120MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 450, 128MB RAM, 650MB hard drive space
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LAN, Internet (2-16 players)

I guess you can't argue with the tried-and-true method of following a proven formula when creating anything, be it a game, TV show, or magazine. Of course, there's a fine line between following a formula and ripping something off completely. *Tactical Ops: Assault on Terror* is straddling that line so well, it's giving itself a wedgie.

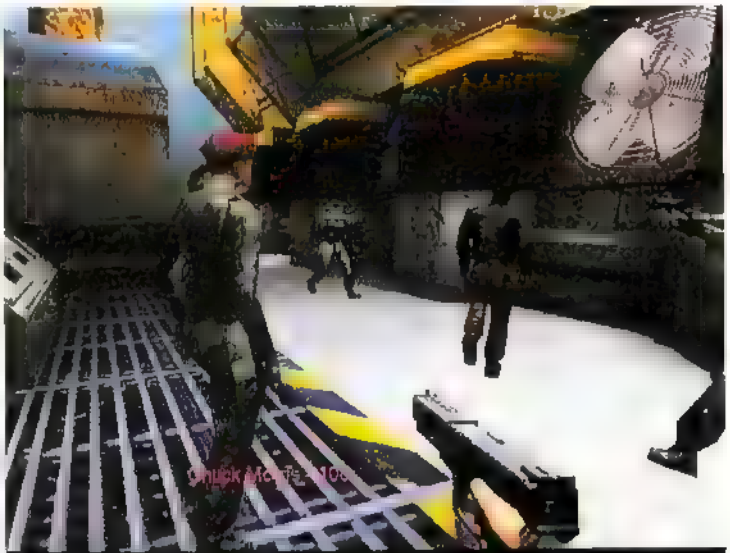
If you wanted to describe this game to someone, all you would have to say is "*Counter-Strike* for the *Unreal Tournament* engine." But the mere suggestion that *Tac Ops* even approaches the supreme level of *Counter-Strike*—which is, as we all know, the greatest game that is, ever was, and ever will be, and if you disagree you can bite my urban-camouflaged rear—is fallacious. *Tactical Ops* has its charms, and it is based on a very solid engine, but it has none of the polish or atmosphere of *Counter-Strike*.

What it does have that *CS* doesn't (at least until *Condition Zero* is released) is a single-player mode, which I hesitate even to mention because it's marred by lackluster bot AI. This fault is actually rather surprising, seeing as how *UT* is so famous for its clever and surprising bots. But the bots in *Tac Ops* will never fool you into thinking they're real people like the bots in *UT*. Their behavior is so predictable that it ruins the fun of playing offline, something more than a few gamers would surely like to do.

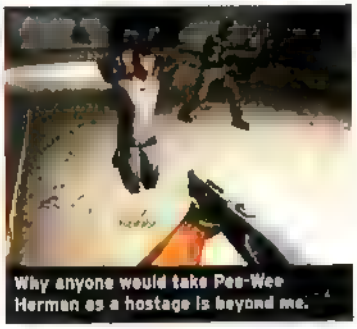
But the main thing that keeps *Tac Ops* from living up to *CS* is the overall presentation. I'm going to be blunt: It looks like complete crap. Models are uninteresting and barely detailed; they're covered in drab textures and the animation is stiff. Either the *UT* engine hasn't aged nearly as well as the *Half-Life* engine, or the people who did the modeling and animations for *Tac Ops* just don't have the chops that the *CS* peeps did.

The levels aren't much better than the models, looking like second-rate, user-created jobs. To make matters worse, levels are either almost devoid of decent choke points or are peppered with choke points, which is really useless considering the game will allow for only 16 players online. Weapon sounds and ballistics are pretty unconvincing as well, a cardinal sin for a shooter that hopes to be real stic

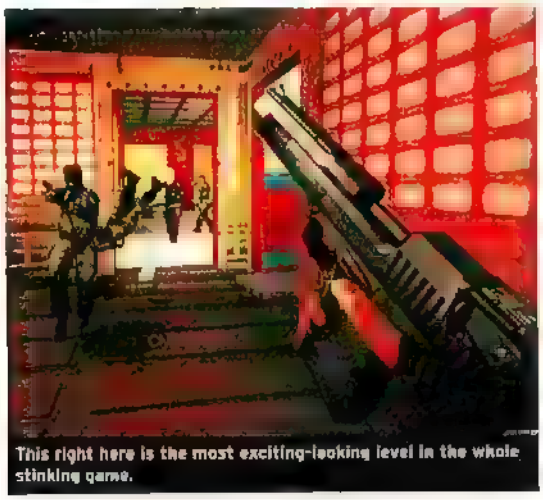
it's not that *Tac Ops* is a bad game, it's just that it's an unnecessary one. Why would you play this game when you can play *Counter-Strike* or some other, more original *UT* mod? The whole counter terrorist-themed, close-quarters combat genre is oversaturated. Do we really need another chance to dress up as SWAT members and run around a warehouse with MP5s, defusing bombs and rescuing hostages? When there's one game out there that gets it so right, nobody really needs another.


Your bot buddies stand around and do nothing a lot of the time. But there are girls!

Wow, look at all the pixilated blood spraying from this dude's head wound.

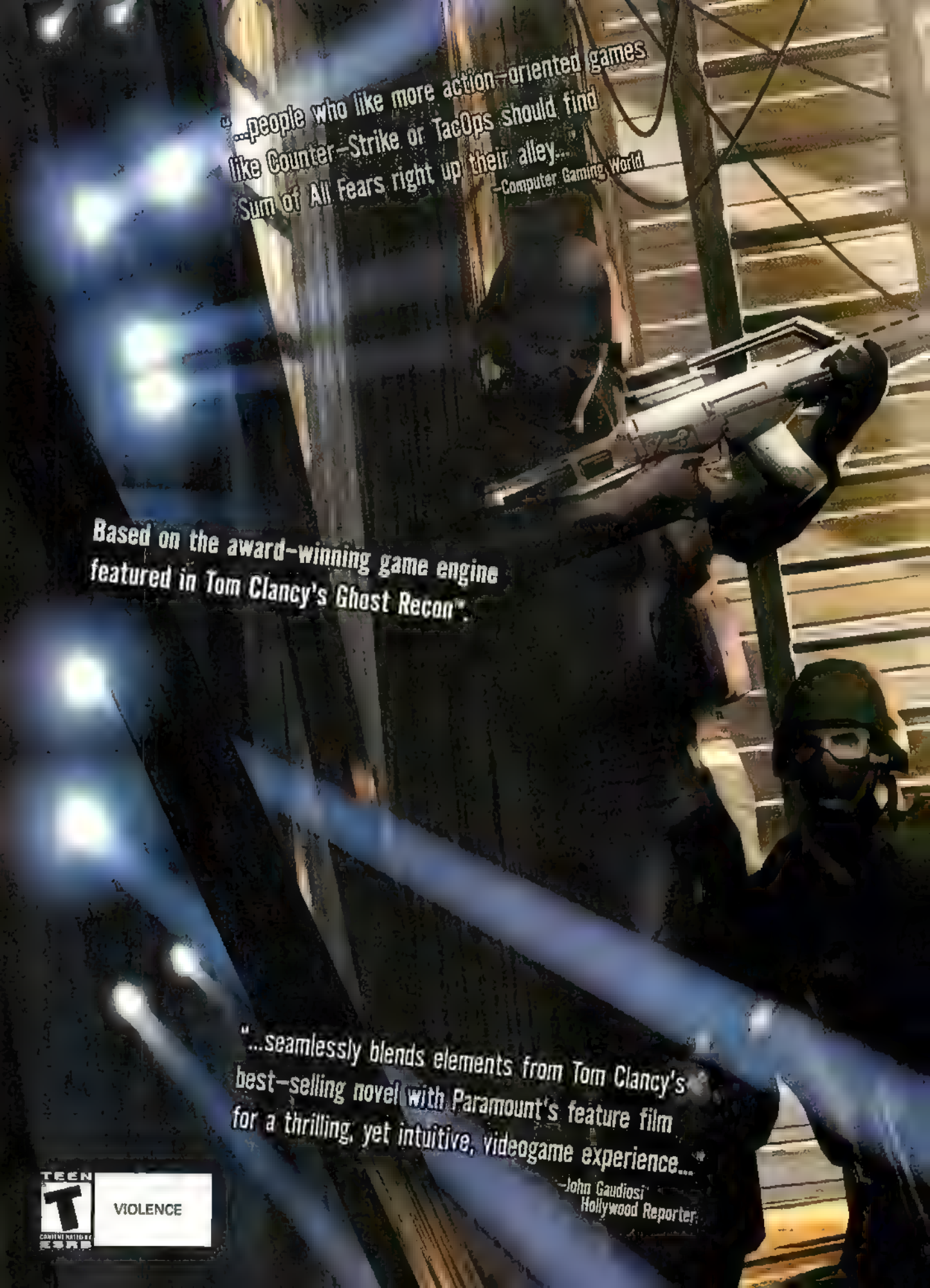

Why anyone would take Pee-Wee Herman as a hostage is beyond me.

The thing that keeps *Tac Ops* from living up to *Counter-Strike* is the presentation: It looks like crap.


This right here is the most exciting-looking level in the whole stinking game.

VERDICT ★★½☆☆

***Counter-Strike* with the *Unreal Tournament* engine: not as good as it sounds.**


"...people who like more action-oriented games like Counter-Strike or TacOps should find Sum of All Fears right up their alley..."
-Computer Gaming World
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"...seamlessly blends elements from Tom Clancy's best-selling novel with Paramount's feature film for a thrilling, yet intuitive, videogame experience..."
-John Gaudiosi
Hollywood Reporter
TEEN
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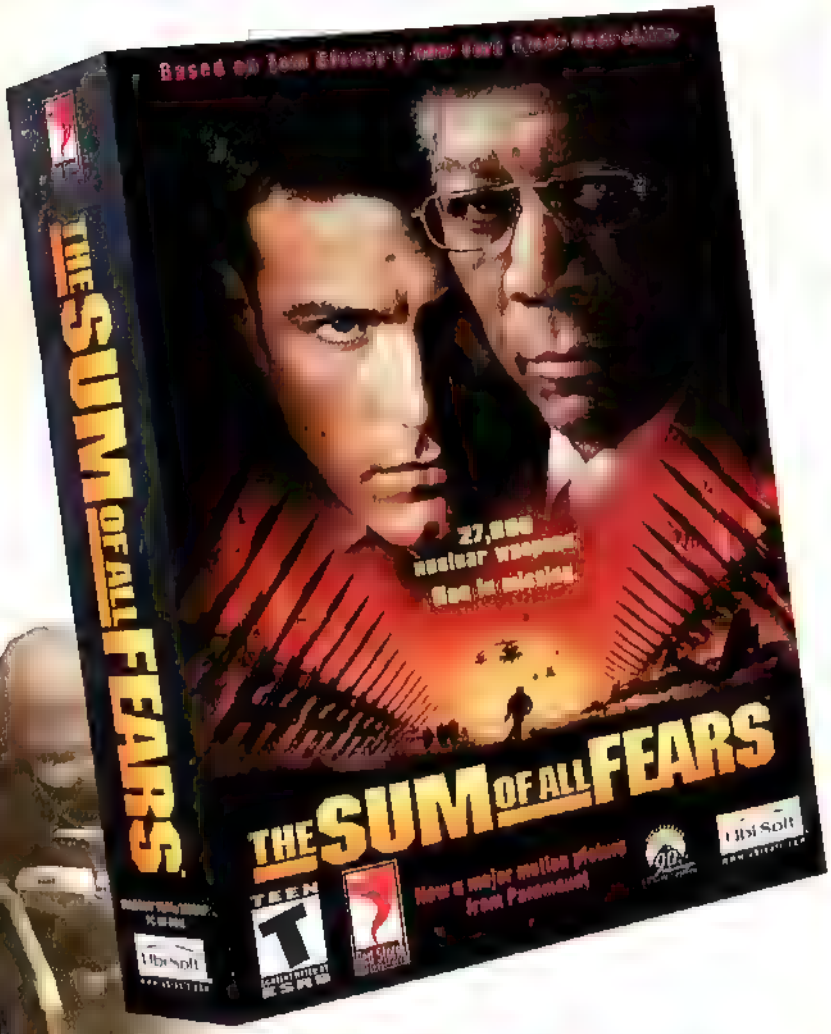
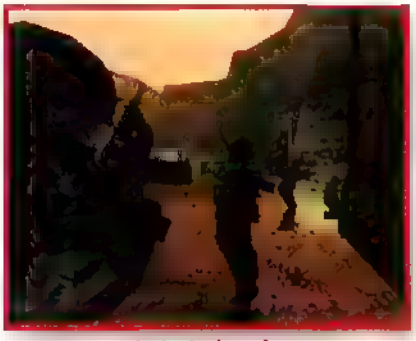
VIOLENCE
ESRB

THE SUM OF ALL FEARS™

BASED ON TOM CLANCY'S *NEW YORK TIMES* BEST-SELLER





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An intense storyline that parallels the novel and film of the same name.

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Formations play an integral part of combat. Archers can defeat heavy cavalry as long as they are placed in wedge formation.

Through all four developmental stages of building, you must keep your civic buildings within manor walls. Only rural buildings can be outside the walls.

Cavalry forces go off to war while a hero guards crucial supply carts.

Warrior Kings

It's all about alignment

By Raphael Liberatore

PUBLISHER Microids DEVELOPER Black Cactus GENRE Real-time strategy with gargantuan tech-tree URL www.warrior-kings.com ESRB RATING Mature; blood and gore, violence PRICE $39.99

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 350, 128MB RAM, 650MB hard drive space RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 733, 256MB RAM, 32MB Direct X-compatible video card MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT Internet, LAN, serial connection (2-8 players)

I've become completely addicted to a game that crashes my computer—a lot. Microids' new real-time strategy game, *Warrior Kings*, has me playing till the wee hours of the morning when I should be sleeping. On the other hand, I'd probably be in bed much sooner if I weren't constantly rebooting my system from freezes caused by bad coding.

Warrior Kings is set against the backdrop of a medieval Europe, where young Artos, heir to the throne of Gallicus, must reclaim his throne from the evil bishop who has destroyed his homeland. Over the course of 22 levels and more than 80 scripted quests, young Artos escapes Gallicus in order to rebuild his forces and then returns to the mainland to free towns, rescue loyal dukes, and make war on the bishop's demonic forces, all in the name of empire building.

Warrior Kings' main focus is resource collection using three types of economic units: peasants, merchants, and carts. Of course, 3D combat also reigns supreme, involving myriad unit types, from archers and heavy infantry to undead legions and gibbering hordes. It's how these units come about that makes the game intriguing.

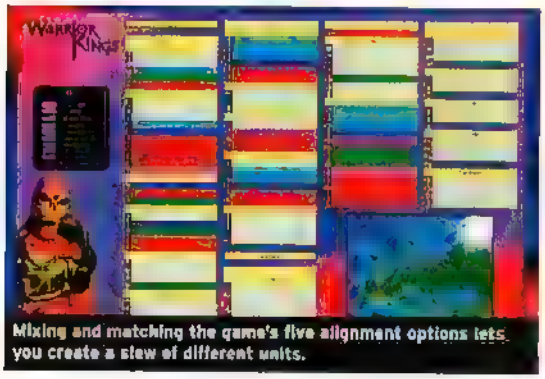
Warrior Kings is similar to other popular strategy games in resource allocation, but it diverges from others by introducing different tech paths players can pursue in order to save Artos' kingdom from enemy forces. The tech tree is balanced and relevant to gameplay, with four developmental stages that Artos must work through in order to succeed. Within the construct of the tech tree lie five possible alignments, each with a different effect on your progress toward supremacy. For example, Imperial offers the strongest defensive units and buildings such as the Holy Warrior, Cathedral, and Holy Fortress. Renaissance has the technological edge in resource gathering, commerce, and siege engines; and Pagan provides units with the best attack values and offers druidic spells and demonic creatures. An interesting feature lets you combine pathways to form Imperial-Renaissance or Pagan-Renaissance buildings, units, and spells.

After Artos reclaims his rightful place on the throne, players may dabble in multiplayer action online with up to eight players. The building paths and tech trees are similar to those in the single-player game, but multiplayer adds a nice element of diplomacy. Not only can a multiplayer session of *Warrior Kings* involve the same subterfuge practiced by the warring Italian states of the later Middle Ages, but players' alignments remain secret until they meet on the field of battle.

As much as *Warrior Kings* gets me excited, developer Black Cactus did its best to make me hate this game for its many bugs. Memory leaks crash your computer just as you're finishing a lengthy mission and heading into the next level, load times are excruciatingly long, and parts of the interface are downright ugly. Add problematic path finding during combat, with units ignoring formation orders or retreating from battle when summoned into combat, and you have a great gaming session suddenly turn sour.

With all its faults, *Warrior Kings*' pros definitely outweigh its cons. If only the bugs weren't as deep as its design...

If only the bugs weren't as deep as its design.



Mixing and matching the game's five alignment options lets you create a slew of different units.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

Even with a legion of bugs, *Warrior Kings* can be a very addictive RTS.

Dragon Throne: Battle of Red Cliffs

Perchance to suck **By Jason "Chim-Chim" Brown**

PUBLISHER **Strategy First**
DEVELOPER **Object Software**
GENRE **Real-time strategy**
URL **www.strategyfirst.com**
ESRB RATING **Teen; blood, violence**
PRICE **$29.99**

REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III, 128MB RAM**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III, 128MB RAM**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **LAN, Internet, Gamespy (2-8 players)**

Despite *Dragon Throne*'s Chinese origin, it's still surprising to find units called Stone Launch ng Wagon or Hammer Man. Considering how slavishly *Dragon Throne* copies *Age of Empires*, I would think the developers had played long enough to learn how to name units. It's obvious they haven't learned how to not ruin most of the fun.

To *Dragon Throne*'s credit, it tries to improve upon *Age of Empires* with some new ideas. *Dragon Throne* uses a two-screen system to clean up the map–clicking the city icon on the regional map opens another huge map that shows your buildings and resource gathering structures. But without any change in scale or other visual clues that you're in the detailed map, the toggle feature completely loses its usefulness.

Dragon Throne also takes some giant steps backward in gameplay evolution. Instead of noticing that others have been whittling down resource types to alleviate micromanagement, *Dragon Throne*'s developers jacked up the number of resources to a mighty seven. Add to this that each city maintains its own pool of six of these seven resources. Why don't other games do this? Because other games don't want you to hate them, that's why.

The ability of basic workers to train to become successively better combat units was lifted directly from last year's *Battle Realms*, but with an important difference: Whereas *Battle Realms* focuses combat on small groups of units so that the whole game isn't spent micromanaging unit progress, *Dragon Throne* prefers to make you do some painful micromanagement.

Unlike the high-quality cardboard of the box it came in, *Dragon Throne* the game is shoddy all around. You can almost overlook the horrible and unnatural translation of the game's original text and the patently bad voice work. *Almost*. You cannot overlook that the vast majority of the game has no sense of style or design. The maps look boring, the units have few and bland animations, the sounds are awful, and someone seems to have forgotten combat effects.

As the *CGW* editorial intern, I know about suffering. And *Dragon Throne* is just more than this horribly abused, dancing teenage monkey-boy can stand.

Just like *Age of Empires*, only uglier and no fun.

Because other games don't want you to hate them, that's why.

VERDICT ★½☆☆☆☆

Use the Stone Launching Wagon to hurl this one into the crapper.

Napoleon's Russian Campaign

How many Frenchmen must die for your amusement? **By Bruce Geryk**

PUBLISHER **HPS Simulations**
DEVELOPER **John Tiller**
GENRE **Wargame**
URL **www.hpssims.com**
ESRB RATING **Not rated**
PRICE **$49.95**

REQUIREMENTS **Pentium 133, 32MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **Pentium II, 64MB RAM, 16MB video RAM**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **PBEM, hotseat, modem (2 players)**

John Tiller's last 19th-century Russian excursion was 1997's excellent *Napoleon in Russia*, which covered the Battle of Borodino. Five years later, Tiller is back with a huge game that covers the whole campaign, but it does so only in single battle installments. The result is that although the game theoretically covers the entire campaign in Russia, it feels much more like a scenario pack.

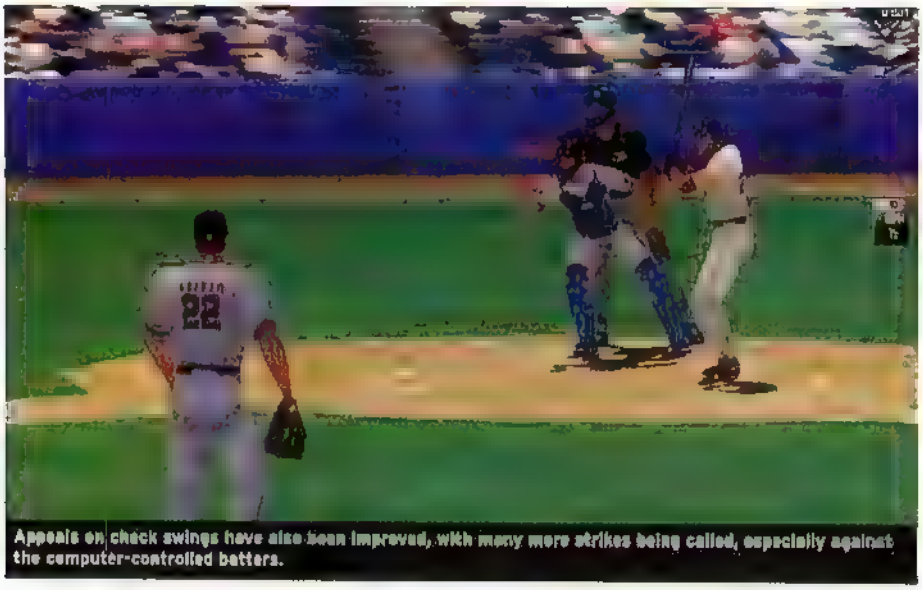
Napoleon's Russian Campaign has more than a hundred scenarios that cover many historical and hypothetical situations based on different assumptions about troop positions, outcomes of battles, and happenstance, but they fail to paint a clear picture of the overall campaign. The manner in which the battles in the campaign game are linked is simplistic and gives the player a set of rudimentary choices with little to help inform decisions. Many of the scenarios are variations of one another (there are 24 campaign versions of Borodino, for example), and only the single battles are really balanced for play.

For Napoleonic wargamers, this is a worthwhile purchase, as Tiller's research and presentation are as solid as ever. But it's unrealistic to expect an engine this old to perform any new tricks; after so many iterations, it's time to think about a successor series.

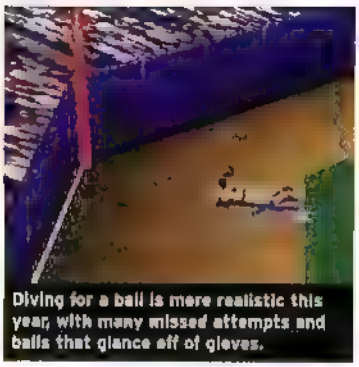
Helping Napoleon escape out of Russia makes for an interesting scenario if not an interesting screensaver.

VERDICT ★★★☆☆☆

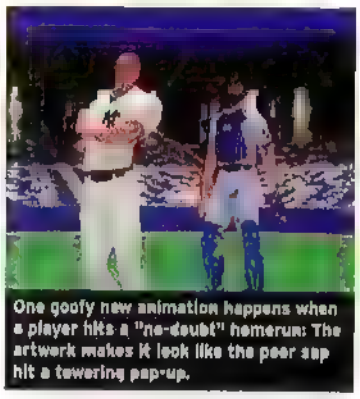
Napoleon fans will enjoy it despite the artificial-feeling campaign.



Appeals on check swings have also been improved, with many more strikes being called, especially against the computer-controlled batters.



Diving for a ball is more realistic this year, with many missed attempts and balls that glance off of gloves.



One goofy new animation happens when a player hits a "no-doubt" homerun: The artwork makes it look like the poor sap hit a towering pop-up.

High Heat Major League Baseball 2003

Wait till next year **By Rob Smolka**

PUBLISHER 3DO
DEVELOPER 3DO
GENRE Sports
URL www.3do.com
ESRB RATING Everyone
PRICE $29.95

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 200, 64MB RAM, 110MB hard drive space, 16MB 3D video card
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 400, 128MB RAM, 300MB hard drive space, 32MB 3D video card
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT Modem, LAN, Internet

When judged against other baseball games, *High Heat 2003* still stands head and shoulders above them in its representation of the sport. Only when it's compared against its older siblings do the warts of this year's game become noticeable and annoying.

Sadly, many of the standard *High Heat* bugs are back. Has 3DO just given up trying to fix the game? For instance, the looping sound bug is back, giving us the pleasure of hearing the commentators, the stadium announcer, and the crowd repeat snippets over and over. The bug isn't a game killer, but it is annoying and detracts greatly from the game's atmosphere (a shame because the play-by-play and color commentary are much improved). Several other bugs have been carried over: pitchers being credited with giving up more earned runs than runs, the occasional crash to the desktop after making a personnel change, a problem with converting seasons from last year's game, among others. A new bug that must be fixed immediately is one in which a run scores, but the game doesn't register it properly. I've seen only it once, but others have reported it as well.

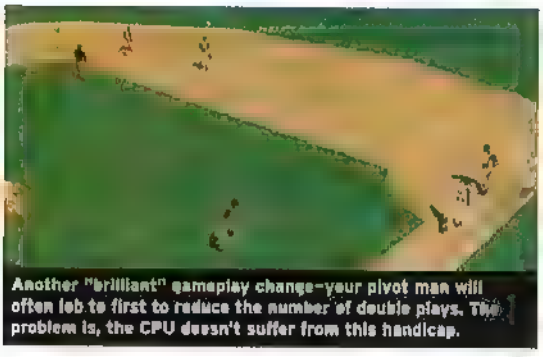
The look of the game has changed very little since last year. There might be a few more animations, but the transition between some of them is as jerky as ever. I've always been partial to the old fashioned look of the game, so I have few complaints here, but if you've been turned off by *High Heat*'s graphics before, you're going to be disappointed once again.

My biggest complaint is how much the pitcher-batter interface has changed. The strike zone has been ridiculously expanded, and the ability to make contact with a pitch seems to have increased exponentially. Couple this with the removal of a few key parameters in the tune file, and you've got trouble.

Not to brag, but after hundreds of games, my skills as a batter are pretty good. In order for my team to produce realistically at the plate, I've always had to bump up the speed of the pitches. I then adjust the other pitches off of the fastball speed. After doing this in last year's game, I was averaging six or seven strikeouts a game. Now, I barely strike out once or twice per game. I can't turn the speed up much more, either, because I have to also adjust the catcher's arm strength to make sure that stealing is still realistic. If I drop the catcher's arm number lower to compensate for the faster pitches, they'll never even reach second base with the throw, much less throw out base stealers.

If I could I'd return to *High Heat 2002*, but my Windows XP system prevents that. My only choice is to keep tinkering with the tune file and hope I figure out a solution. But even if I fail, I'll live with the skewed strikeout numbers and the other quirks, because there isn't a better game. It's a shame, though, that this great series has taken a few steps backward.

I'll live with the skewed strikeout numbers and the other quirks, because there isn't a better game.



Another "brilliant" gameplay change—your pivot man will often lob to first to reduce the number of double plays. The problem is, the CPU doesn't suffer from this handicap.

VERDICT ★★★☆☆

Do yourself a favor and download roster updates for *HH2002* instead.

WHEN IN ROME...

JULIUS CAESAR (100 – 44BC)

Used bribes, gladiator contests, and banquets to further his political leadership of Rome. Shattered the Helvetian invasion in a crushing defeat in 58BC. Quelled Gallic resistance conquering Gaul and adding it to the Roman Empire in 50BC. Murdered in 44BC by a band of senatorial conspirators for political gains.

JULIUS OCTAVIUS AKA: 'AUGUSTUS' (63BC – AD14)

Marched on Rome and forced the senate to accept him as consul at the age of 20. Defeated Marc Antony in the battle of Actium and added Egypt to the Roman Empire in 30BC. Described as one of the most skilled and talented rulers of Rome.

HARVEY JONES AKA: 'TACO GRANDE' (AD1964–

Amassed a huge army and conquered Southern Italy from his bedroom at 3:00AM. Signed a diplomatic treaty with the Volscians over a slice of pepperoni and a coke. Built Rome in a day not including bathroom breaks. Social life (what's left of it) put on hold until the conquest of Britain is complete.

Epic Gameplay • Huge Realistic Battles • 20+ Opponent AIs
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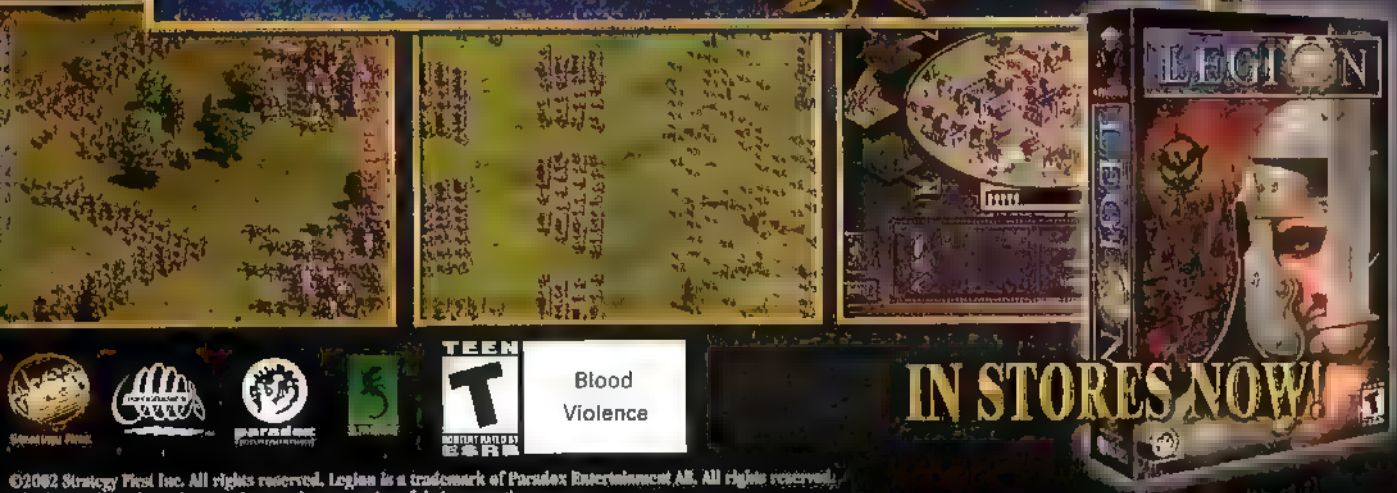
LEGION



TEEN T Blood Violence

IN STORES NOW!

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The new Zaxxon perspective doesn't do much to improve playability or looks.

Heroes of Might and Magic IV

The harder they fall By Jason Kapalka

PUBLISHED BY New World Computing GENRE Turn-based strategy URL www.heroes4.com ESRB RATING Everyone; animated blood, violence PRICE $44.95

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 300, 128MB RAM, 750MB hard drive space RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 450, 256MB RAM MULTIPLAYER None whatsoever...promised for a "future patch"

Heroes of Might and Magic IV, like the sequel to a much beloved movie, is the sort of thing you really want to like. And at first, you can persuade yourself, in the face of evidence to the contrary, that you *are* liking it. But then, in the same way you slowly realized you really weren't liking *Robocop 2*, you slowly, sadly realize you aren't liking this game either.

There is some good news for hardcore fans. In a nod to *Disciples'* branching upgrade paths, *Heroes* no longer lets you build every structure in a town; instead you must choose between several mutually exclusive buildings. For instance, if you choose to have mages, you won't be able to build the golem producing structure. It's a nice, if unoriginal, feature and helps distinguish one maxed-out town from another.

The other pleasant feature is that you can now build caravans that allow you to funnel troops quickly to wherever you need them. This goes a long way toward reducing the tedium of having various "golem" heroes ferrying troops back and forth.

From Heroes to Zeroes

But it's all downhill from there. The graphics for the *Heroes* series continue to degrade. The hand-drawn, storybook style pictures of the first two games partially gave way to soulless 3D renderings in the third game, and in *Heroes IV* the transformation is complete. Everything looks like a plain-vanilla 3D studio model from a community college course in computer graphics: stiff, unconvincing, and lifeless. There's enough gorgeous 2D art hanging around in menus and splash screens to remind you that New World used to produce the best 2D fantasy art around. Now they produce some of the absolute worst in 3D. The town screens, formerly gorgeous and atmospheric, are now bland and frankly useless, with all the structures looking alike. You'll almost instantly find yourself using the tiny text menus for every function.

The combat screens are no improvement. Having a more "realistic" 3D isometric perspective instead of the quaint gameboard feel of the earlier games, the new system is an almost unmitigated disaster. The best you can say for the units is that they're mostly distinguishable from one another. You can no longer turn on a grid overlay, so distances are difficult to judge. The interface and feedback are atrocious: It's often impossible to tell who's doing what to whom, or why, while it's all too easy to send units careening around the map when you meant for them to shoot arrows.

Line of Blight

Beyond the interface, various baffling

The menu screen represents the apex of the graphic delights in store in *Heroes IV*.

The new town screens lack character, and, even worse, it's hard to tell one building from another. At least building types are in the same place in each town.

While combat can be shown in resolutions up to 1280x1024, it doesn't do anything to hide the generic nature of all the units.

The new combat system is an almost unmitigated disaster.

changes were made to the core system of tactical combat. Fire missiles at an opposing ranged troop and they'll automatically shoot your troops first...talk about effective return fire! Strange line-of-sight rules have been implemented, causing ranged units to do one-half, one-quarter, or one-eighth damage to some opposing troops. I defy anyone to explain the logic of the algorithm in use. The formerly tense castle battles have become, for lack of a better word, stupid: You can no longer break down walls with siege engines, but oddly enough your troops have no problem attacking adjacent computer foes right through the walls.

The big change in combat, though, is that your heroes are now active units and do more than just influence the battle indirectly via spells and leadership modifiers. At first this seems like an interesting idea, but in practice it's alternately irritating and ridiculous. In early stages, your heroes are unbelievably vulnerable, often getting mowed down in a single volley. In the campaign, losing your main hero like this abruptly ends the game, although heroes can be resurrected easily. Then in later stages, it's a relatively trivial task to create invincible heroes, especially if you pair a magic user with a fighter, a combination capable of laying waste to the mightiest enemy armies all by themselves, effectively negating the main points of the game—the recruiting of troops and monsters and the upgrading of towns and castles.

One could go on. One could ment on the degradation of the once-cunning AI into a passive adversary content to tread water and basically cheat. Or the poorly designed campaigns that have you randomly switching sides. Or the new alignments or town types, where creatures are slopped into various categories with little rhyme or reason. (Quick. Should mermards be in Life or Order? Should pirates be in Chaos or Might? Should ce demons be in Death or Nature? You got me.) Or the paucity of stand-alone scenarios as compared to *Heroes III*. Or how clicking the Multiplayer button gives you a message saying, "This feature will be available shortly."

One could go on, but what's the point? Longtime fans are better off sticking with the third *Heroes* or picking up *Disciples II*. Here's hoping New World takes a long, hard look at their priorities before they get to work on the inevitable *Heroes V*.

VERDICT ★★½☆☆

The once-great *Heroes* series has slid into mediocrity.

Like every other game released since 2000, *Army Men: RTS* has the requisite flamethrower.

Army Men: RTS

Tiny men fighting little wars under giant tricycles By Tom Chick

PUBLISHER 3DO
DEVELOPER Pandemic
GENRE Real-time strategy with plastic
URL www.3do.com
ESRB RATING Teen; violence
PRICE $34.99

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 233, 64MB RAM, 310MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 400, 96MB RAM, 32MB Direct X-compatible video card
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT Internet, LAN (2-8 players)

3DO has slapped their *Army Men* license over some bad games, so it doesn't bode well when they put it on yet another real-time strategy game with the stunningly generic name *Army Men. RTS*. It's as if someone forgot to change the working title. To 3DO's credit, they've handed over the responsibility for actually making the game to Pandemic, the creators of the underrated *Dark Reign 2* (these guys know how to make an RTS) and *Battlezone II* (and they know how to rise above a crappy licensing tie-in).

Pandemic has the right idea: tiny, plastic men in a full-size world. The maps are strewn with toys, clothespins, stray soccer balls, and towering flowers. A tricycle looms over the battlefield like a skyscraper. Instead of Quonset huts, the soldiers' bases are soda cans. Dead units leave a puddle of plastic that can be reclaimed, rendered down in a blender, and molded into new units.

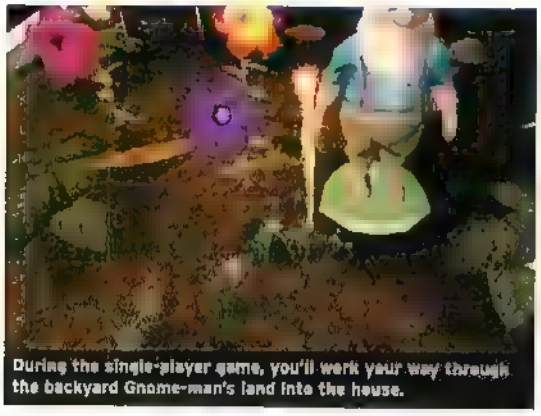
Best of all, there's a clever spread of weapons and units here, from long-range mortars to rapid-fire machine guns and radio operators with special attacks. It's all molded into streamlined gameplay, with easy controls, no camera woes, and a good 3D engine. The interface allows you to build from anywhere on the map and easily find special units. This is about as simple as you can get without stumbling into the action genre.

Unfortunately, Pandemic overlooked some of the fundamentals of a playable real-time strategy game. There are no commands for guarding, patrolling, or selecting all units of one type. There's no variable speed. There's no good way to keep groups together, which is the kiss of death for a game that requires you to mix units to play effectively. Thanks to horrible pathfinding, groups move in long lines that undulate like an accordion. The faster guys arrive first and the tanks lag far behind. When you're not busy trying to keep groups together, you can try to keep your dump trucks from wandering into enemy fire to pick up spare blobs of plastic.

The single-player game is a series of preset scenarios, including some annoying puzzle missions. The longevity comes from replaying them to meet bonus goals that unlock extra scenarios. Strategic AI is but a shell, so you can't play skirmish games against the computer.

Although having only one side to play makes the game easy to learn, it also sucks a lot of potential out of the multiplayer game, which is inflexible enough as it is. *Army Men: RTS* is not as bad as it could have been, but neither is it as good as it should have been.

This is about as simple as you can get without stumbling into the action genre.



During the single-player game, you'll work your way through the backyard Gnome-man's land into the house.

The camera lets you move down low for more dramatic perspectives.

VERDICT ★★½☆☆☆

Better than most *Army Men* games—but that's not saying much.

Tour of Duty

The definitive tactical Vietnam wargame **By Bruce Geryk**

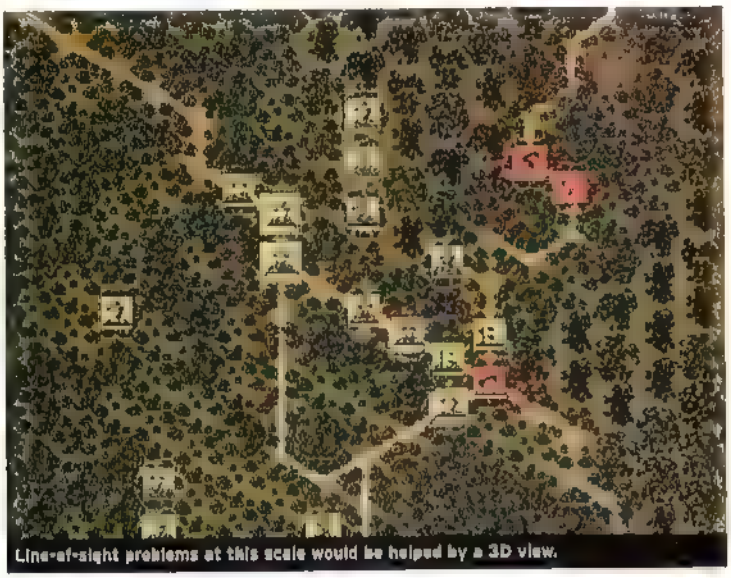
PUBLISHER **HPS Simulations**
DEVELOPER **John Tiller**
GENRE **Wargame**
URL **www.hpssims.com**
ESRB RATING **Not rated**
PRICE **$49.95**

REQUIREMENTS **133MHz Pentium, 32MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **Pentium II with 64MB RAM, 16MB video RAM for large battles**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **PBEM, hotseat, Internet, LAN (2 players)**

John Tiller is always tweaking his designs, so it's not surprising that for *Tour of Duty*, the follow-up to last year's Wargame of the Year, he's added features to the basic engine that made *Squad Battles: Vietnam* so successful. Unfortunately, the price for this tweaking is a game that is incompatible with its predecessor. That's a shame because, unlike Tiller's other games, these two products cover essentially the same ground. But if you don't have the original and you enjoy old-style, turn based wargames with a heavy boardgame feel, *Tour of Duty* is the obvious choice between the two.

Among the features added in *Tour of Duty* are tunnels, smoke, and illumination rounds. The inclusion of smoke is interesting, as it was apparently specifically left out of *Squad Battles: Vietnam*—Tiller's research showed that smoke was almost never used in the situations depicted in the game. The complaints from wargame fans about that omission show that perception in wargaming is often reality. *Tour of Duty* also lacks a 3D view, which is too bad because it's the only one of Tiller's games that could use one.

The inclusion of a campaign game as well as South Vietnamese, Australian and South Korean forces makes *Tour of Duty* the definitive tactical Vietnam wargame. Just be prepared to leave those *SBV* scenarios behind.



Line-of-sight problems at this scale would be helped by a 3D view.

Perception in wargaming is often reality.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

Tour of Duty is another Wargame of the Year contender from Tiller.

Squad Battles: The Proud and the Few

Go take that bunker, Butterbars! **By John Fletcher**

PUBLISHER **HPS Simulations**
DEVELOPER **John Tiller**
GENRE **Wargame**
URL **www.hpssims.com**
ESRB RATING **Not rated**
PRICE **$49.95**

REQUIREMENTS **133MHz Pentium, 32MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **LAN, Internet, modem (2 players)**

The Proud and the Few is the third instalment in John Tiller's *Squad Battles* series. Last year's *Vietnam* won *CGW*'s Wargame of the Year award. *PATF* will be a contender for this year's title.

PATF covers company-level combat in the Pacific during World War II and perfectly captures the bitter, yard-by-yard character of the island hopping campaign. *PATF*'s success lies in its having transformed a 2D boardgame into a gripping, cinematic experience. The superb unit portraits humanize the action and convey surprising amounts of personality. Expert, well-balanced scenario design limits available assets and time, making every move tense and vital. Finally, clever sound design, incorporating distinctive ordnance samples and ambient sounds, brings the game to life. It's easy to form mental images of men creeping through the steaming jungle or steeling against a ferocious banzai charge. Having established this visceral connection to the subject matter, *PATF* ties it all together with voluminous reference materials, turning the game into a true learning tool.

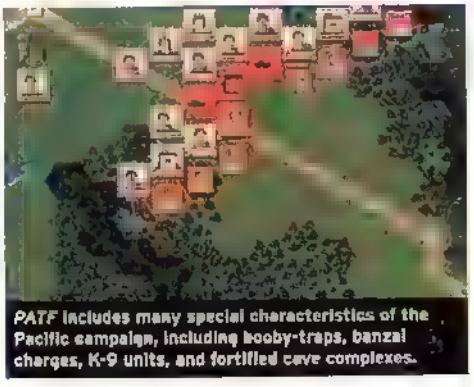
My only complaint is that *PATF* lacks a campaign game. Having been drawn in, I wanted to follow my men through each operation.

The game's success lies in its transformation of a 2D boardgame into a gripping experience.

Nevertheless, *The Proud and the Few* is an excellent wargame that will retain a prominent spot on my shelf.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

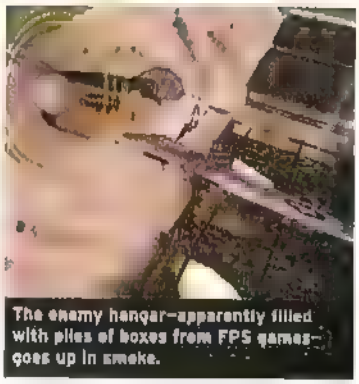
Earns a Silver Star for conspicuous gallantry in advancing the wargame genre.



PATF includes many special characteristics of the Pacific campaign, including booby-traps, banzai charges, K-9 units, and fortified cave complexes.

The bomber missions are the most refined, allowing you to man the controls, guns, or bombsight.

A rocket run from the virtual cockpit view in a P-51D.



The enemy hangar—apparently filled with piles of boxes from FPS games—goes up in smoke.

Jane's Attack Squadron

Two years late and 90 percent finished By Denny Atkin

PUBLISHER Xicat
DEVELOPER Mad Doc Software
URL www.xicat.com
ESRB RATING Everyone: violence PRICE $39.99

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 400, 128MB RAM, 16MB 3D card
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 600, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LAN, Internet (2-8 players)

The most impressive thing about *Jane's Attack Squadron* is that it shipped at all. When developer Looking Glass Studios went out of business in 2000, Electronic Arts ran screaming from the simulation market, leaving the game for dead. Eventually the game was officially picked up by new developer Mad Doc Software and publisher Xicat. But although *Attack Squadron* had the potential to be sim of the year in 2000, time and unrealized design goals make it an also-ran in 2002.

Set in the European theater during WWII, *Attack Squadron* lets you fly 15 types of American, German, and British aircraft in single-mission campaign, instant action, and multiplayer scenarios. The two campaigns feature a mix of aircraft—you might fly a defensive mission against attacking B-24s in an FW-190 on one mission, and perform a torpedo run in a Ju-88 bomber on the next. Missions are scripted, but the enemy does occasionally surprise you. The campaign branches depend on your success or failure in each mission. The game's biggest problem is that it has very few missions built in—only 10 missions in each campaign, and a mere five single missions.

Fighter-versus-fighter combat is generally fun, with good pilot AI, an excellent padlock system, and decent if not overly detailed flight models. But *Attack Squadron*'s high points are in the bomber missions. You can jump from station to station, manning gun turrets as fighters attack. Then jump into the nose and use the Norden bombsight to take out an enemy factory. Flak explodes around you and crippled bombers plummet below you. The immersion is excellent.

The graphics would have been state of the art in 2000. As you'd expect from a Looking Glass simulation, the terrain looks superb from high altitude, but low-altitude details like 3D trees are absent here. Aircraft are a mixed bag; the 3D models and their texture maps lack detail compared to today's sims, but damage effects are very impressive. Also on the bright side, the overall frame rate is great on even a midrange system. Special effects, such as bursting shells and explosions, are well done, and the sound effects are top-notch.

If there's hope for *Attack Squadron*, it lies in the detailed physics and mission editors included with the sim. The editors are not easy to use—and you'll have to download the manuals—but the user community has already started to improve on the flight models and to build new campaigns. Check out www.thunder-over-europe.com for the latest enhancements.

Out of the box, though, *Attack Squadron* has a number of problems in addition to its limited mission set. Throttles don't work with some USB controllers, multiplayer is unreliable, and fighters occasionally fall to pieces when firing their own guns. Some of the planned features didn't make it in, such as the flight recorder and the Me-163 Komet (though this has been enabled by user-created patches). Frame rates are generally smooth, but numerous explosions taking place simultaneously can cause the game to become a stuttering mess.

In the end, *Jane's Attack Squadron* is a lot like an old MG convertible. It's quirky, dated, and has its share of reliability problems. But if you're willing to tinker under the hood a bit and put up with the occasional breakdown, it can be fun to drive.

An FW-190 attacks a gaggle of B-24s. Note the twisty contrails from high-altitude combat.

VERDICT ★★★☆☆

It's buggy, but when it works it's worth flying.

SnoCross Extreme

Slip slidin' away By Gord Goble

PUBLISHER Groove Publishing
DEVELOPER Unique Development Studios
GENRE Racing
URL www.groove-publishing.com
ESRB RATING Everyone
PRICE $19.99

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 266, 32MB RAM, 160MB free hard drive space RECOMMENDED Pentium III 333, 64MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT Two-person split-screen, LAN (2-4 players)

Anyone who finds dirt-spewing sprint cars the quintessential traction-free racing experience has clearly never witnessed a snowmobile race. Groove Publishing's *SnoCross Extreme* takes off from the loopy world of real-life snow mobile competition, jacking up vehicular horsepower to obscene levels and putting you on suicidal courses that smack you about and toss you into the sky like a Barry Bonds home run. A wild and entertaining—though short-ride, *SnoCross* has a semi-believable physics model, a nifty repair and upgrade shop, and some of the tools to be a great game, but it suffers from a bad case of budget title syndrome.

Its console roots are immediately obvious. The game does not support analog acceleration or braking. Its manual is ridiculously skimpy, its lack of a save-game function is appalling, and its menus are annoying—you can't use the mouse to navigate. The seven confining courses force you to bounce off barriers and scenery just to change direction, and its otherwise very impressive track editor produces circuits that are drivable only solo or in multiplayer mode, not against the AI. And that's unfortunate, because you can conquer the game's 17-event championship in just a few hours.

Some arcade racing buffs will undoubtedly find the game's low price, pleasant if unspectacular appearance, and high thrill factor a satisfactory combination. But most veteran drivers will lament that developer UDS was unable to transform a very promising nucleus into a better finished product. *SnoCross Extreme* could have been something, but the game's subject matter and impressive physics are done in by its budget execution.

A SnoCross rider gets a bit off-kilter coming off a jump.

A wild and entertaining ride, but a short one.

VERDICT ★★½☆☆
Only if you're in the mood for short-lived racing fun.

GAME PATCHES

Revisionist History

World War II Online

By Thomas L. McDonald

Words can hardly convey the torment of last summer's mind-splatteringly botched launch of *World War II Online*. It was as though a preliminary design document had been spirited away from Cornered Rat and turned into code by cavern-dwelling blind albino chimps.

It didn't have to be so. The team involved had a good track record and the concepts were golden. There's no point in rehashing the litany of problems. When I reviewed it in our October 2001 issue, I complained about everything but the box art—which, come to think of it, also kind of sucked.

But let's put that behind us. I won't say all is forgiven, because vexing problems remain, including the initial load time, some stubborn graphical glitches, and the awkward communication system. Units still randomly fly into the air and float for a few minutes, although this was supposed to have been fixed.

On the good side, Cornered Rat has done much to improve performance. They've beaten frame rates and lag time into line and mercifully streamlined the hated infantry weapon interface, so you don't need to raise your gun manually every time you shoot. Respawning now takes a fraction of its former time, which infinitely improves the gameplay and also helps mitigate some of the lengthy transit times. Gamers are more willing to pop out and spawn as a truck now that it doesn't take up to 10 minutes each time.

The Yanks have yet to enter the fray, but a number of new weapons have been added on both sides, including the Hawker Hurricane Mk1, 47mm antitank gun, the Pzllc, Bf110, and more. A token naval element is now present in the form of naval bases and one model of river craft (the Fairmile) for both sides. I searched for an available boat at ports on both sides to no avail, but it's supposedly there somewhere. Spawn limits and various weapon tweaks have gone a long way toward balancing the game and mitigating the "Char" rush problems.

Career mode and kill tracking are now part of the game, as are some terrific, updated theater maps that show the shifting front lines over the course of hours. Getting into action remains slightly awkward thanks to a clumsy front end, but the process is serviceable. The community has developed, and gamers have figured out how to work together. The progress has been astonishing and unexpected, making the game something that it wasn't before: enjoyable.

Blood Omen 2

Bringing *Legacy of Kain* back from the dead **By Shane Bettenhausen**

PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive DEVELOPER Crystal Dynamics GENRE Action-adventure URL www.eidosinteractive.com ESRB RATING Mature; violence PRICE $39.99

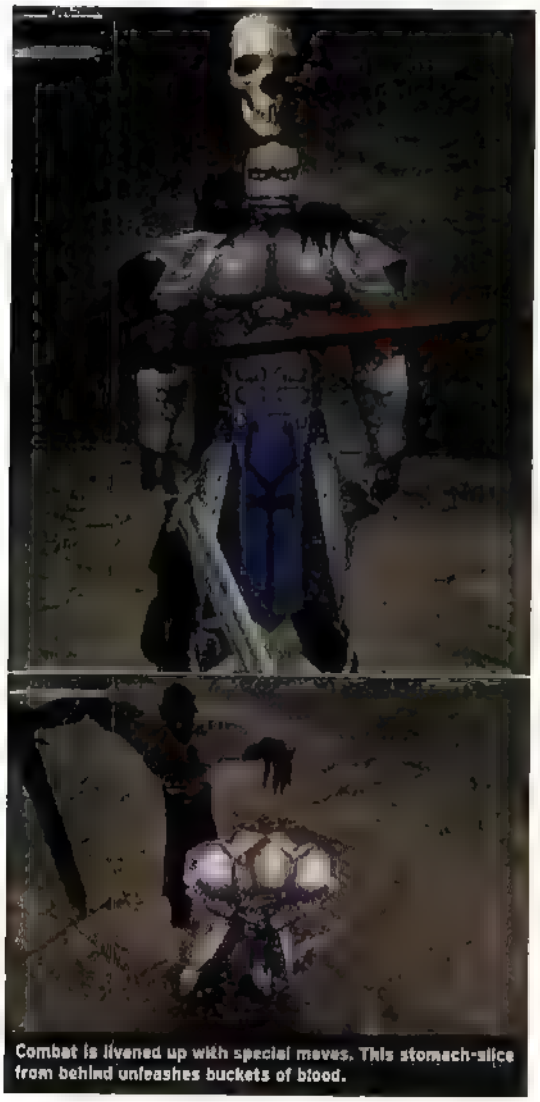
REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 450, 128MB RAM, 1.6GB hard drive space RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 600, 2GB hard drive space MULTIPLAYER None

If you're thinking to yourself, "Didn't I avoid another *Legacy of Kain* console port nary five months ago?" you're right—the disappointing *Soul Reaver 2* infected store shelves with its taint of mediocrity late last year. Luckily, this journey into the dank realm of Nosgoth doesn't suck. It's the true sequel to the original *Blood Omen*, an action/RPG cult hit that came to PC back in 1997. Unlike the cinema-heavy, meandering *Soul Reaver* titles, *BO2* offers an engrossing mix of puzzles and combat that's worth your time.

It's some 400 years after the first *Blood Omen* (yet still long before the events of the *Soul Reaver* games), and Kain finds himself deposed from his ironfisted rule. Nursed back to health by requisite sexy vampire Umah, he sets out to regain his place as ruler of the realm. He's frazzled, frustrated, and above all else, thirsty for the sweet flavor of human blood.

Kain is a vampire after all, so expect a lot of sucking in this game.

Because vengeance is Kain's driving ambition, combat is frequent. The fighting engine relies heavily on blocking, so mastering timely defense is absolutely necessary for survival. A wide variety of weapons bolsters Kain's somewhat limited arsenal of moves—a three-hit combo and a few grapples. It's a passable fighting system, and unlike the *Soul Reaver* games, *Blood Omen*'s experience-point-based Lore system makes combat worthwhile.



Combat is livened up with special moves. This stomach-slice from behind unleashes buckets of blood.

For a deposed king of the undead, Kain sure has to flip a lot of light switches.

Blood Omen 2's puzzles start off with a whimper. For a deposed king of the undead, Kain sure has to flip lots of light switches and push countless crates. Luckily, these boring puzzles don't last long. As Kain amasses special abilities, deemed Dark Gifts, the game introduces new obstacles. You'll have to effectively utilize long jumps, mind possession, and telekinesis to traverse later stages. Not only do Kain's ever-increasing abilities deepen throughout the game, but the level design also improves as you progress. The final four stages are the game's best, so stick with it.

Visually, this title crushes the *Soul Reaver* titles in every way. At first glance it seems like merely a high-res iteration of the console title, but this port suffers from none of the crippling slowdown issues that plague the PS2 version. The character models are simple, but the mammoth urban environments truly amaze. A grimy, creepy sheen coats the shops, churches, and castles of this unique society. Much of the game is set in the sprawling city of Meridian, but later levels boast massive caverns, H.R. Giger-inspired palaces, and a beautiful floating asylum.

The developers handled the audio with similar care, hiring talented, professional voice actors for all the major roles. A moody, ambient mix of medieval sounds and atmospheric effects provides a suitable musical backdrop.

Control has suffered a bit in the transition from console to PC. Stay away from the clunky keyboard and mouse options; a gamepad makes life much, much easier. But even with a controller you'll be wishing for the ability to strafe. The game feels like an FPS anyway, so the ability to sidestep would help greatly.

Ultimately, *Blood Omen 2* comes together to offer a satisfying, modern take on the action-adventure genre. Snazzy graphics, professional voice acting, and captivating gameplay combine to create what is easily the highpoint of this series.

VERDICT ★★★½

Don't be turned off by its console roots: *Blood Omen 2* is a gorgeous, gothic adventure that offers a rewarding, captivating quest.

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3

Duuuuuude! This game is hella fresh! **By Tom Price**

PUBLISHER **Activision**
DEVELOPER **Neversoft /Gearbox**
GENRE **Sports-action**
URL **www.activision.com**
ESRB RATING **Teen: blood, mild language, suggestive themes**
PRICE **$39.99**

REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III 800, 64MB RAM, 850MB hard drive space, 16MB 3D accelerator**
RECOMMENDED **Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D accelerator**
MULTIPLAYER **Internet, LAN (2-8 players)**

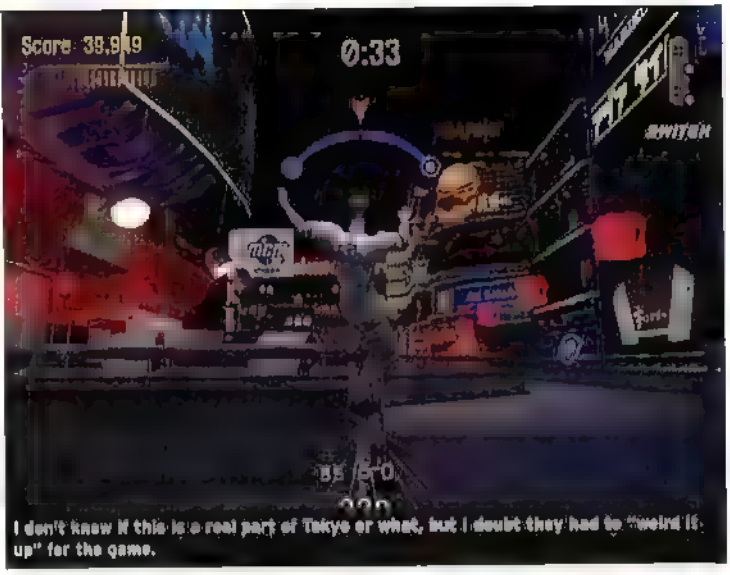
I think that even the most hardcore PC gamers—the type of people so devoted to their killer rig that they won't even allow a console across their doorstep and spend days on end engaging in PC-versus-console flame wars online—secretly want to play all those really amazing games that are console based. Well, all of us closet fans are in luck because one of the most impressive console series has been ported. The resulting PC game is as good as, if not better than, the original PlayStation 2 best-seller.

We're talking about *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* of course, a game that was absolutely sublime in its previous incarnation as a PS2/Xbox/GameCube game and brings a whole new level of arcade-style sports fun to the PC. Despite what the naysayers claim ("It's a button mashing orgy," "It's for kids," and so on) *THPS3* is one of the most addictive and entertaining games you'll play, regardless of the platform you prefer.

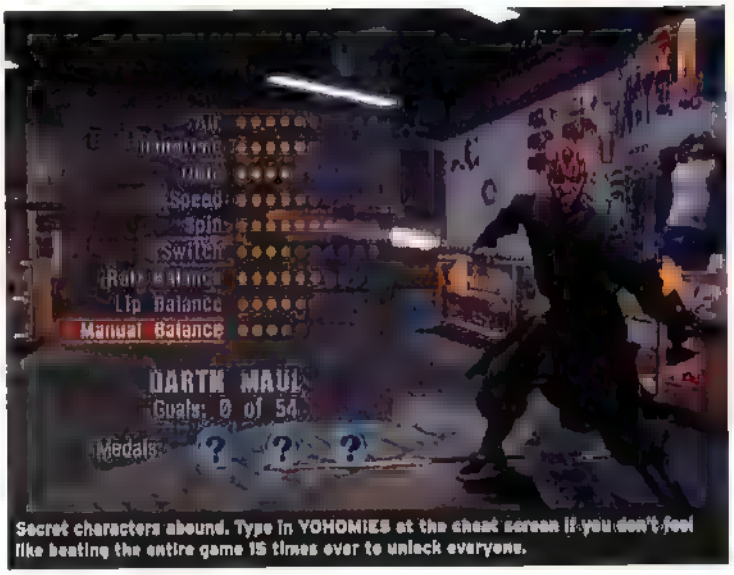
Just because it's on the PC doesn't mean it's some shoddy port. Gearbox, the group that brought you such esteemed PC titles as *Half-Life: Opposing Force* and the upcoming *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*, has done a stupendous job of making Tony feel right at home in the higher resolution of your PC. The game looks fantastic (as it should on a high powered rig), running extremely smoothly at 1024x786 and higher. We share office space with *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, and one of its editors even admitted that *THPS3* on the PC looked far superior to the PS2 version.

The core game remains mercifully unchanged. That may keep away the PC gamers who assume it's shallow or just a button masher for the kids, but those folks are missing the subtle nuances and smart touches that make this game so brilliant. The levels are far more than simple recreations of skate parks. *THPS3* maintains the tradition of whims cat levels jam-packed with multiple objectives, clever jokes, and hard-to-find secret areas with levels such as a cruise ship, haunted houses, factories, and a really weird futuristic Japan level. Old favorites like Steve Caballero and Kareem Campbell from previous games are complemented by new characters like Bam Margera (of *Jackass* fame) and secret characters you can unlock, like Wolverine, Darth Maul, and the Beach Bum.

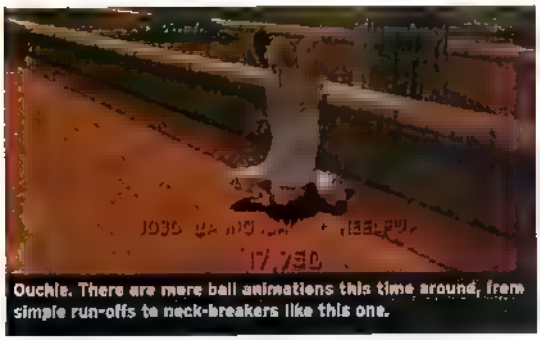
I wish I could put my finger on what makes the *THPS* games so addictive. I think it has something to do with the sheer number and variety of objectives. The goals demand that you thoroughly hone your skills to achieve success, and achieving the goals opens new areas and features. Sure, the game also offers up lots of visceral fun—mostly from making a little digital character do things that you'd never be able to do in real life, which is pretty much the essence of gaming, right? But the mountain of content in the game, with its laugh-out-loud humor, bizarre levels and uniquely sick tricks, makes for a piece of real entertainment. For that alone, *Tony Hawk Pro Skater 3* should be enjoyed by everyone, whether you're a 15 year old kid from Orange County California, playing on a GameCube in your parents' living room, or a 35-year old homemaker from Peoria, Illinois, playing on the family PC. This game shouldn't be missed.



I don't know if this is a real part of Tokyo or what, but I doubt they had to "weird it up" for the game.



Secret characters abound. Type in YOHOMIES at the cheat screen if you don't feel like beating the entire game 15 times over to unlock everyone.


Ouchie. There are more bail animations this time around, from simple run-offs to neck-breakers like this one.

VERDICT ★★★★½

Some of the most fun you can have on any gaming platform.

This expansion provides new activities for your Sims, ranging from fishing off the pier to fending off aggressive balding dudes in Hawaiian shirts.

The Sims: Vacation

Beach blanket bingo **By Elizabeth McAdams**

Published: EA Games
Developer: Maxis (UK)
Genre: Human simulation
URL: www.thesims.com
ESRB Rating: Teen; comic mischief, mild violence, suggestive themes
PRICE: $29.99

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, 700MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: Pentium III, 128MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER? None

Recently, I was chatting up a storm with my friend Wendy, wife of the lovable and huggable Dan Hsu over at *Electronic Gaming Monthly*. We are both eagerly anticipating *The Sims Online* and shamefully admitted to one another we would fork over mucho subscription fees to feed our sad, sad *Sims* addictions.

Lucky for us Maxis has released their latest expansion, *The Sims: Vacation*, to hold us over until *The Sims Online* debuts. Now your Sims can finally take a break from their grueling day jobs. By calling a travel agent from home, your entire Sims family can spend some quality time together by roughing it in the woods, showing off their hot bods by the beach, or even ice-fishing in the snowy mountains. And as in any true Sims fantasy, you can always screw the family and take the secret lover you met downtown on a little getaway instead.

The Sims: Vacation works exactly like the last expansion, *Hot Date*, which was released only five months prior to this. Vacation Island is a separate area that your Sims can visit for a pretty price, and there are various vacation-themed lots to choose from. New characters are present on Vacation Island and, as in past expansions, you can use the game's Build mode to customize the area to suit your own preferences. Build mode has more than 120 new objects for your amusement.

In what is probably best feature of the game, *The Sims: Vacation* offers plenty of new interactions and social situations to keep your Sims from becoming bored. If you are not a jock in real life, you (or rather your Sim) can become one simply by joining a match of beach volleyball or nailing a 180 on the half-pipe. For the truly obsessive-compulsive (um, me), the act of collecting all the special vacation souvenirs and stuffing them into your trophy case back home can amount to a significant miniconquest in itself.

The Sims: Vacation does rely heavily on the previous expansions for interactions and relationships, and without them, this game wouldn't be as much fun. It's also marred by some performance problems that detract from the gameplay, so I hope there's a patch in the works.

Still, this is another fine addition to the *Sims* family. It's not my favorite expansion—that would be *Hot Date*—but it adds enough of a twist to justify spending another 30 bucks. Is Electronic Arts beating a dead horse with yet another *Sims* expansion? Maybe. Do I mind if they beat a dead horse? Not really. Does *The Sims: Vacation* even begin to quench my thirst for *The Sims Online*? Not even close.

VERDICT ★★★★½

Another great, if inessential, addition to the *Sims* family.

Alfred Hitchcock Presents: The Final Cut

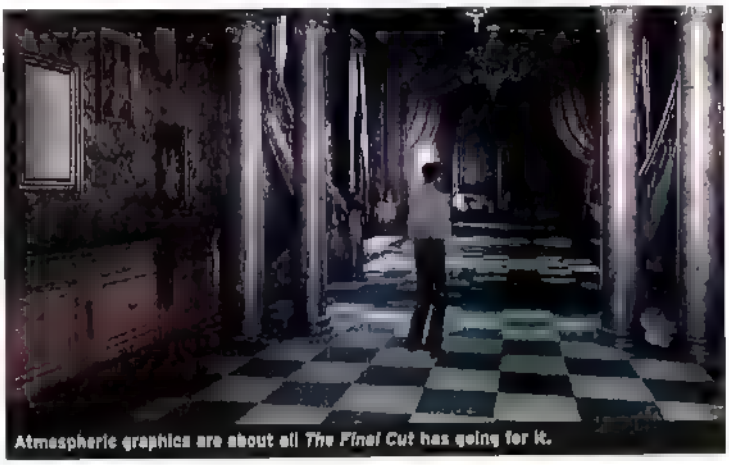
This tribute to the master is for the birds By Charles Ardai

PUBLISHER Ubi Soft DEVELOPER Arxel Tribe GENRE Adventure URL hitchcock.arxeltribe.com ESRB RATING Mature; violence PRICE $29.99

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 333, 64MB RAM, 300MB hard drive space RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS 128MB RAM MULTIPLAYER None

Hitchcock died in 1980; the adventure game genre died around 1998. And although there have been occasional attempts to revive both—Hitchcock in a posthumous TV series, adventure games in periodic European imports—Mary Shelley taught us how likely such experiments are to succeed. *Alfred Hitchcock Presents: The Final Cut* is not the hopeless mess it might have been, but it is not a success either. The designers obviously love the classic movies and games to which *The Final Cut* pays homage, but enthusiasm isn't the same thing as talent, and another Hitchcock (or, for that matter, another LucasArts), they're not.

The game's best feature is its striking, atmospheric appearance. Although the game is "shot" in full color, the deep shadows and lighting effects suggest an ominous black and white universe. The game also introduces a clever device for organizing the interface. You can access your inventory, journal, save function, and map from a Palm-style PDA called up by right-clicking anywhere on the screen. But the PDA interface is not as well designed as it is clever, and it leaves you fumbling each time you try to use it. The rest of the game's interface is even worse, often forcing you to scour the screen for invisible hotspots and sometimes even reboot if you can't figure out how to get the action in certain scenes unstuck. A good save system helps, but it's disabled during some of the game's ill-conceived action sequences, which is when you need it most.



Atmospheric graphics are about all *The Final Cut* has going for it.

It's not the hopeless mess it might have been, but it is not a success either.

Even more disappointing than the interface is the barely comprehensible storyline. A psychic detective is asked by the mute daughter of a missing millionaire to find her father and the crew he was working with to film a suspense movie. As you explore the movie set, you stumble across an equal number of dead bodies and hokey references to the Hitchcock canon, accompanied by brief clips from some of the Master's movies, which are here presented as "psychic visions." Nothing makes much sense. Matters aren't helped by the game's prose, which seems to have been translated into English by a nonnative speaker, or by bugs that cause the sound to cut out in the middle of sentences.

Some years ago, there was a game based on *Plan 9 From Outer Space* that had a lot of the same weaknesses as *The Final Cut*, but there you accepted the shoddiness and incoherence as part of the joke. Is it asking too much to hold a game that invokes the name of Alfred Hitchcock to a higher standard than one celebrating the work of Ed Wood?

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

A stylish appearance isn't enough to make up for awkward gameplay and an incoherent plot.

Diggles: The Myth of Fenris

Shut up and get to work, you idiots By Erik Wolpaw

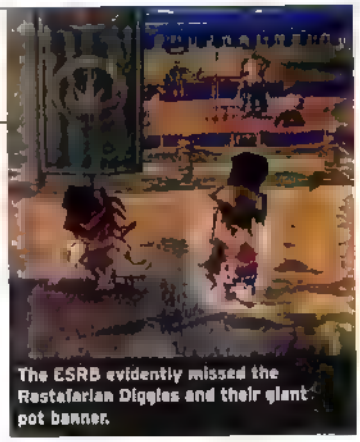
PUBLISHER Strategy First DEVELOPER Innonics GENRE Strategy URL www.strategyfirst.com ESRB RATING Teen; blood, comic mischief, mild violence PRICE $40

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 350, 128MB RAM, 1GB hard drive space, 32MB graphics card RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 500, 256MB RAM MULTIPLAYER None

Eventually, every crazy idea has to be tried. If it works, great. If not, hey, at least nobody else has to waste time repeating the mistake. With *Diggles*, German developer Innonics has scientifically proven that a game combining a traditional strategy element with the virtual-life aspect of *Creatures* falls squarely into the "bad idea" category. So, taxonomically speaking, you could say that Innonics has done the world a big favor here.

Imagine playing *Age of Empires* if each of your units were a precious little individual whom you had to make happy before he'd do anything. And then, even if he were happy, he'd still take his sweet time. You want to know the one fundamental rule of games? They're supposed to make me happy. Not the other way around. Micromanaging the leisure time of a lazy, recalcitrant dwarf work force in an effort to inspire them to slowly, slowly execute my orders when they decide they feel like it: That is not fun. And speaking of those rascally *Diggles*, you know who else has a doggone mind of their own? Everyone in the real world—which is why I play games to escape.

What's next, Innonics, booze that makes you more acutely aware of your failures?

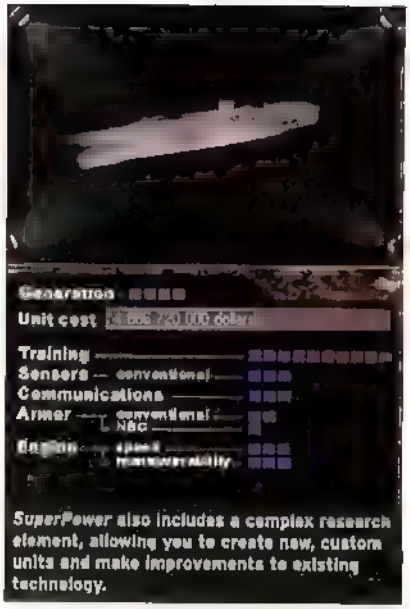


The ESRB evidently missed the Rastafarian Diggles and their giant pot banner.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

Slow. Frustrating. Not the best idea for an escape.

Simple, repeated actions require an endless amount of back and forth between sluggish screens and lots of mouse clicking without any real reward or true sense of progress.



SuperPower also includes a complex research element, allowing you to create new, custom units and make improvements to existing technology.

SuperPower

Muster an army of a thousand mouse clicks and rule the world! By Thomas L. McDonald

PUBLISHER DreamCatcher Interactive DEVELOPER GolemLabs GENRE Strategy URL www.dreamcatchergames.com ESRB RATING Everyone PRICE $29.99

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 200, 64MB RAM, 300MB hard drive space RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 450, 128MB RAM MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT None

When I realized, after four hours of game time, that *SuperPower*'s integrated MP3 player was its most consistently enjoyable feature, I knew I was in for a long, long haul.

Like *Balance of Power*, *Shadow President*, and *CyberJudas* before it, *SuperPower* is a geopolitical simulator. As leader of any one of 140 countries, you use trade, diplomacy, and force to stay in power, keep the plebes quiet, and expand your empire. You accomplish all this by clicking lots of little buttons and sliders spread throughout myriad confusing menus laid atop a world map.

The overlays are the heart of the game, allowing you to manage cities and military bases, diplomacy, trade and taxes, the military, espionage, research, and construction of new weapons. Running the world apparently involves repeatedly performing routine tasks with the maximum number of mouse clicks and frequent crashes to the desktop. Vital feedback on your actions can be impossible to locate in the tangle of end turn summary screens.

Developer GolemLabs makes much of the massive database, sophisticated AI, and realism which would be fine if these features were wedded to a usable interface and the gameplay were more interesting than *TurboTax* and more plausible than *Risk Jr.* In the very first turn of my very first session, poor, unpopular unstable little Mexico offered the thriving U.S. of A. a giant block of financial aid. *SuperPower*'s most entertaining feature is this utter detachment from reality—despite its being touted as hyperrealistic.

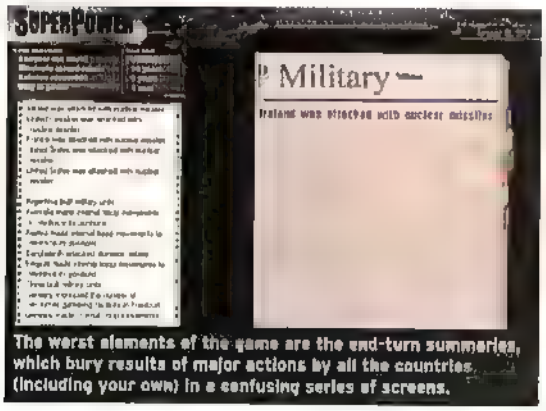
Countries without navies routinely launch unprovoked attacks on countries on the other side of the world (maybe their armies all fly coach to the battle field). Think of an absurd matchup and you'll find it here: Haiti versus Ireland, South Africa versus Egypt, Russia versus Canada, and so on. Allied countries and native populations are fickle, not getting as upset about sudden war as they do about tax hikes and trade disputes. The developers are confused in their socioeconomic ideas as well, modeling a Reagan-esque Laffer curve while using indicators of the socialistic International Monetary Fund to gauge growth and popularity.

The game may include the detailed 4,000-unit military database GolemLabs boasts of, but it doesn't amount to much in practice. Uneventful one week game turns occupy most of your time until you get bored and invade Guam. Available forces are deployed in large lumps, with a cumbersome interface hamstringing any attempt to group and maneuver them as an effective fighting force. Opposing sides fling themselves at each other and mingle until someone wins.

The experience is less like leading a superpower than it is like running Chad, which I understand is about to send its mighty navy to conquer Luxembourg, which no doubt will respond with a full thermonuclear barrage.

VERDICT ★☆☆☆☆

It's wealth of detail and apparent complexity can't hide *SuperPower*'s fundamental dullness.



The worst elements of the game are the end-turn summaries, which bury results of major actions by all the countries (including your own) in a confusing series of screens.

Running the world apparently involves repeatedly performing routine tasks with the maximum number of mouse clicks.

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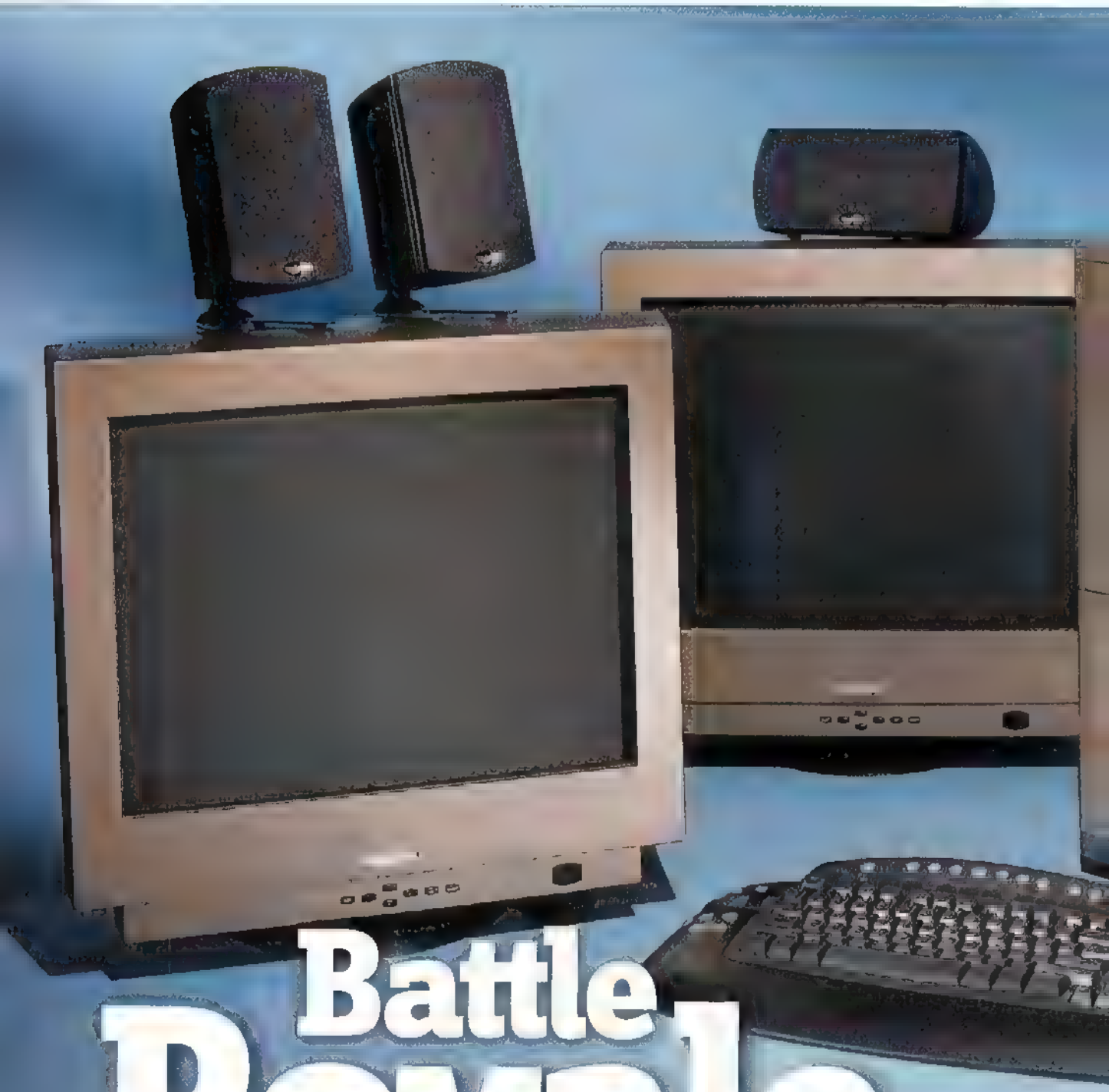
The best ways to part with your hard-earned money Edited by William O'Neal



Battle Royale

Six PC manufacturers sent us their top-of-

the nine rigs and we went to work By William O'Neal

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD DIOSEJO

It all began so simply: Kelt Reeves from Falcon Northwest called me up one day to tell me about a sweet new rig he was putting together; he wanted to know if I was interested in checking it out. "Hell, yeah," I replied. Who wouldn't want to get their hands on one of his rigs? No sooner had the phone hit the receiver than I got an email from Voodoo Computers bragging about the computing muscle in a new machine they had built. "Sure," I told Rahul Sood, Voodoo's energetic owner. "I'm getting a machine from Falcon, too; maybe I'll do a head-to-head."

Although this story's beginnings seem humble, within a week, what had begun as an average system review had spiraled out of control into what I present to you here: a six rig battle featuring top-of-the-line machines from some of the hottest PC manufacturers around.

My assignment ahead of me, I set to the task of benchmarking all of these beasts. Hours in, however, I realized had gotten myself into a bind. How was I to compare a $5,430 machine from an outfit like Alienware to a $2,699 machine from new kid Vicious PC? After much soul-searching and deferring to the "expertise" of my superiors, I decided to rate the machines on four criteria: speed (performance), price, component quality, and reputation. The new guys, of course, have little in the way of reputation, but that doesn't mean these companies aren't good, only that they haven't been around long enough for us to get a bead on what their technical and customer support is like. To balance the scales, a high-end boutique company like Falcon or Voodoo might get slammed on price (but remember that they also make less expensive machines that are more than fast enough for that *Sims* addiction you've been trying so hard to kick).

So sit back, read on, and send all nasty messages to ken_brown@ziffdavis.com. Enjoy!

DELL DIMENSION 8200

URL www.dell.com
PRICE $2,537
★★★★½

It's an understatement to say that Dell is a juggernaut in the PC manufacturing game. They've been beating the pants off the likes of Compaq, Gateway, and HP for years, but it does come as a surprise that they would prevail in a battle that includes companies like Voodoo, Falcon, and Alienware. But Dell's success here may not be as much a testament to the company's ability to assemble a good machine as it is an example of tech's nature to get cheaper even as it gets better. Any 2.4GHz Pentium 4 machine with a 128MB GeForce4 Ti 4600 is gonna be plenty fast.

The Dimension 8200 here boasts the aforementioned CPU and graphics card, as well as 512MB of PC800 RDRAM; a 7200-rpm, 120GB hard drive; a Sound Blaster Live sound card, Harmon/Kardon 2.1 speakers, and a 19-inch monitor. Sure, it's not the sexiest beast in this battle, but at $2,537 you could still upgrade it with higher-end components without breaking the bank. For instance, I'd put in a Sound Blaster Audigy sound card instead of the Live Value.

The Dimension 8200 was damn fast, though, scoring 10922 on MadOnion's 3DMark2001 SE at 1024x768x32 and 134 frames per second in *Quake III: Arena* at 1600x1200x32 with everything turned on. The Dimension came out as the overall winner in this roundup, but there are things about this machine that some hardcore users won't like. Dell ships the rig with a proprietary motherboard that, although quick, is no Intel 850MV2. Also, the design doesn't make it the easiest machine to upgrade. Nevertheless, the Dimension is a fast, cheap machine that comes from a highly reputable company that you know will be around next year.

BUY IF you want a fast, inexpensive machine from a strong, reliable company.

SKIP IF you want the fastest machine that money can buy and you value upgrade capacity.

ALIENWARE AREA 51

URL www.alienware.com
PRICE **$5,430** (complete system with two 22-inch monitors and Klipsch ProMedia 5.1 speakers)
★★★★½

In this year's Ultimate Gaming Machine story (January), Alienware landed squarely in third place. Their machine

was fast alright, but it wasn't as fast as the offerings from Falcon Northwest and Voodoo Computers. The Area 51 that I tested then also suffered from some stability problems, and in order to complete the 3DMark2001 SE test, I needed to undo some of the overclocking Alienware had done at the factory.

Well, Alienware seems to have learned from that experience. The Area 51 they submitted for this story was overclocked, but it wasn't the most overclocked rig here—and it was easily the fastest machine in this contest. It scored an unheard-of 11561 in 3DMark2001 SE at 1024x768x32 and 340 in Ziff Davis' 3DWinMark2000. But although the Area 51 was the fastest machine overall, the Voodoo F-Class beat it in every 1600x1200x32 test.

And then there's the price. This setup, replete with two monitors, is costly as hell. Who among us has $5,430 to drop on a computer? Of course, there is the option of getting just the basic system for $3,357. Shipping with 1GB of PC800 RDRAM, the Area 51 boasts a 2.4GHz Pentium CPU; a 128MB Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600, dual 120GB, 7200-rpm Western Digital hard drives in a RAID array; and a cool set of peripherals like a GearGrip Pro carrying harness and a Plantronics headset.

The fact that the Area 51 handily won all of the SYSmark2002 tests shows that it is a great overall rig, and the two 22-inch monitors make it a great choice for anyone doing Web design or graphics work.

BUY IF money is no object and you want or need the fastest machine that you can get your hands on, or if you just can't pass up the allure of those dual monitors.

SKIP IF you want the fastest machine for running games at 1600x1200x32, or you'd rather not spend $5,430 on a gaming rig.

FALCON NORTHWEST MACH V

URL **www.falcon-nw.com**
PRICE **$4,285** (complete system with 22-inch monitor and Klipsch ProMedia 5.1 speakers)
★★★★☆

The Falcon Northwest machine was the first to arrive, so it set the bar by which all the other rigs were measured. The first thing that caught my eye was the sweet custom paint job applied to the Coolermaster ATC-110 Extended ATX case. In addition to the eye candy, the Falcon rig came stocked with some awesome hardware: AMD's Athlon XP 2100+ CPU, 512MB of PC2100 DDR RAM, a 128MB Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 graphics card; and 160GB of storage in the form of a four-disk, IBM DeskStar 7200-rpm RAID array. The Internet Keyboard Pro and IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0 that ship with the Mach V are fantastic, as is the Adaptec IEEE/USB 2.0 combo card—subtle features that seriously enhance this machine.

FALCON NORTHWEST MACH V

Built around the ASUS A7N266 nForce motherboard, the Mach V was really fast, scoring 134 frames per second in *Quake III: Arena* and 115 fps in *Serious Sam: The Second Encounter* at 1600x1200x32. The Mach V's 3DMark 2001 SE score of 10754 at 1024x768x32 is high, but not as high as the other scores in this roundup. Falcon does overclock their machines, but their commitment to stability overrides their urge to squeeze out a few extra frames per second. In other words, they give up some speed in order to assure that your machine always runs smoothly.

BUY IF you want an ultrastable machine that's been built with top-notch peripherals from a highly respected manufacturer.

SKIP IF you're either on a budget or have endless funds and want the very fastest machine around.

VOODOO COMPUTERS VOODOO F-CLASS

URL **www.voodoopc.com**
PRICE **$5,500** (complete system with 22-inch monitor and Klipsch ProMedia 5.1 speakers)
★★★★☆

In many ways, the F-Class that Voodoo submitted for this story is a souped-up version of the rig that won this year's Ultimate Gaming Machine roundup: an AMD Athlon XP 2100+ CPU, 512MB of PC2700 DDR RAM, a 128MB Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 graphics card, and a 120GB Western Digital SE 7200-rpm hard drive. Sporting a dope paint job that Voodoo calls "Lamborghini Yellow," the F-Class is built around the MSI KT3 Ultra-ARU motherboard.

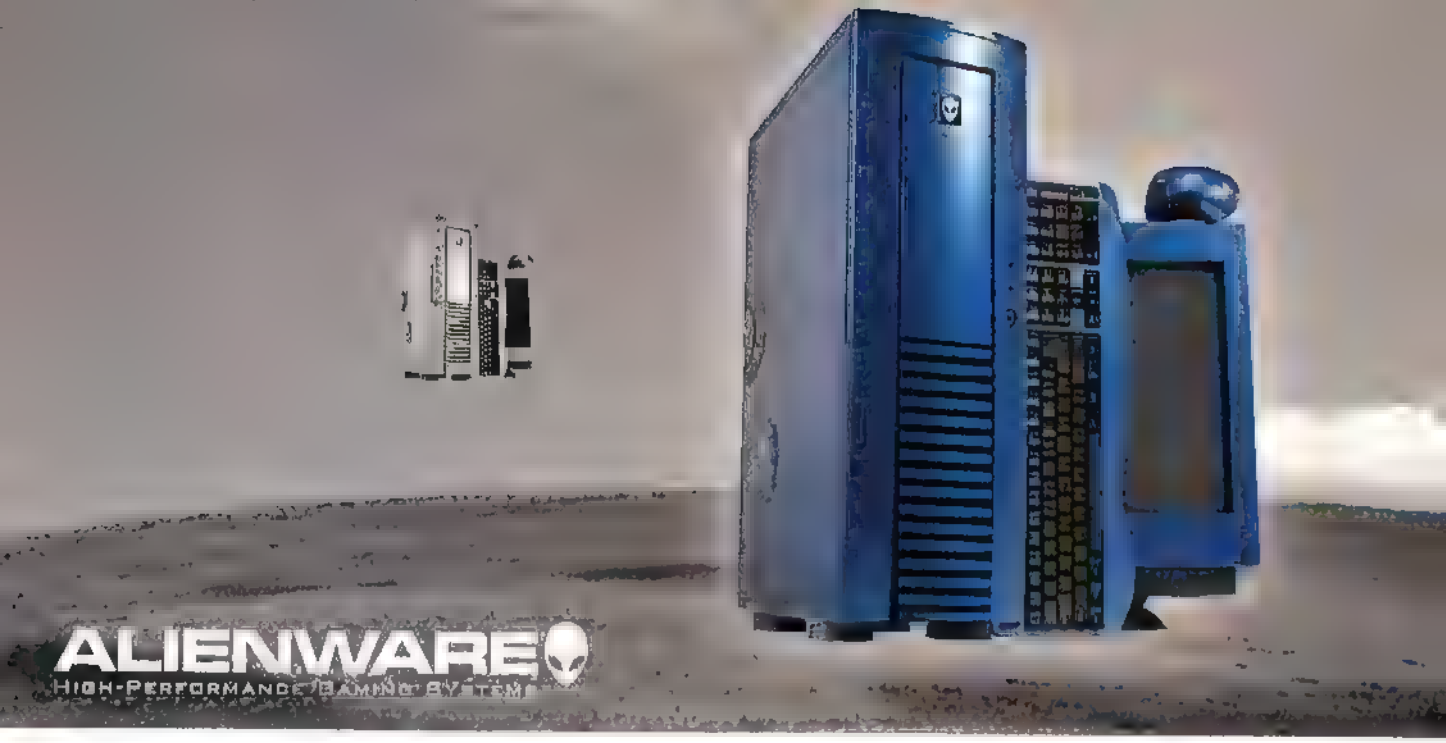
Voodoo's F-Class is intended for the hardcore LAN gamer who wants to wow friends with a cool-looking machine as well as brute strength. Similar to the Falcon machine, the Voodoo comes equipped with some of the dopest parts available, although I'm not a big fan of the Logitech mouse or IBM keyboard. (Again, I'd opt for Microsoft's IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0 and a Microsoft keyboard instead.)

The F-Class scored the third-fastest 3DMark2001 SE score of the six machines tested. It was also the fastest of the Athlon rigs—10990 at 1024x768x32—but Voodoo did overclock this machine a bit. The Voodoo achieved the best 1600x1200x32 scores, beating all the others at 3DMark2001 SE, *Quake III: Arena*, *Serious Sam: The Second Encounter*, and *Re-Volt*.

BUY IF you have more money than God and want a solid machine that smokes when running games at higher resolutions.

SKIP IF you don't have the funds, and you don't need the fastest machine money can buy.

VOODOO COMPUTERS F-CLASS



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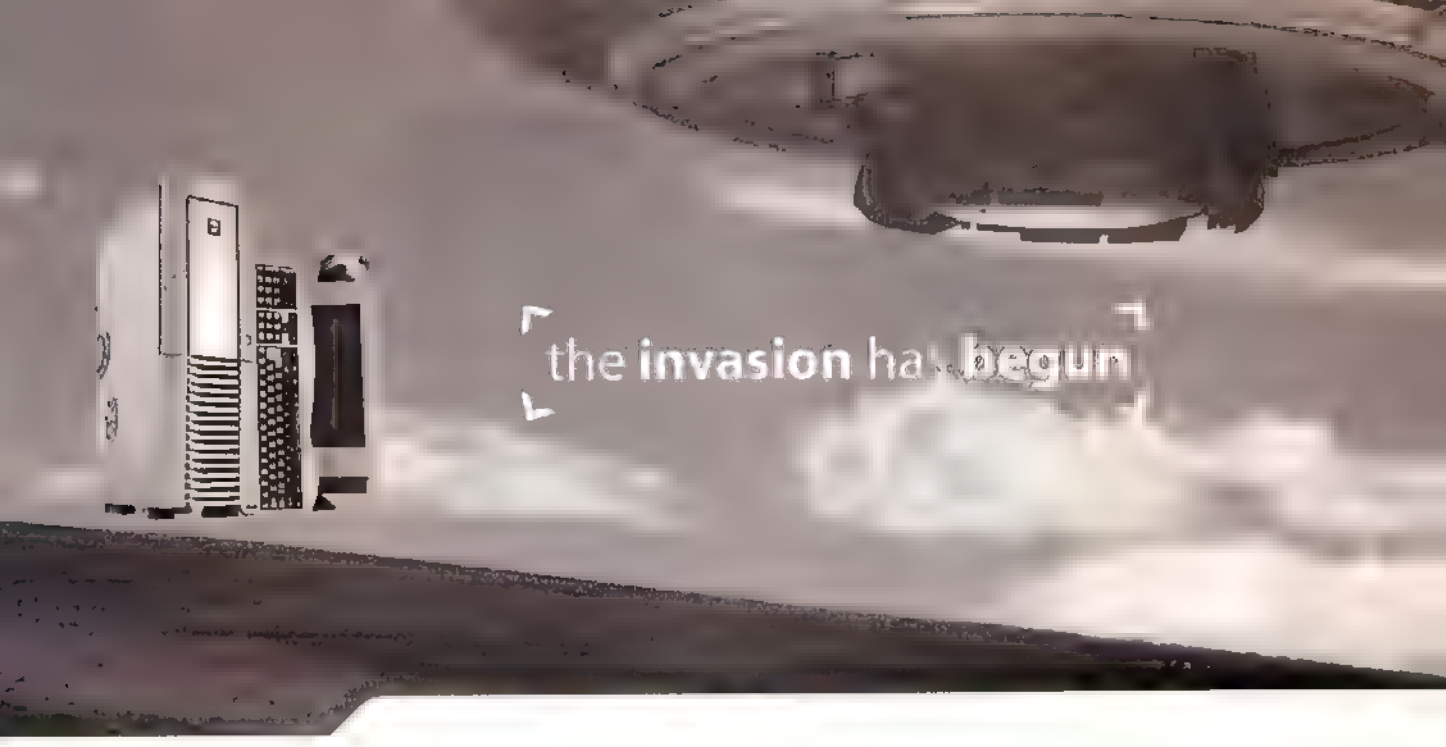

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Koolmaxx™ Video Cooling System
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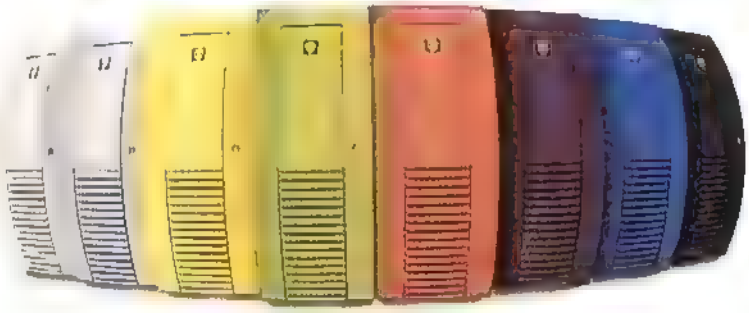

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ABS COMPUTERS D508 ABS DIGITAL 1

URL: **www.buyabs.com**

PRICE: **$2,249** (complete system with 19-inch monitor and Klipsch ProMedia 5.1 speakers)

★★★★½

Prior to receiving several email messages from readers asking me what I knew about ABS Computers, I had never even heard of this southern California outfit. So I called and told them I was interested in reviewing one of their machines. They asked what kind of machine I wanted to test, so I told them to send me their top-of-the-line rig. Imagine my surprise when "top-of-the-line" meant a $2,249 2.4GHz Pentium 4—and they didn't overclock it. But then, there was no real need to. The thing came equipped with 512MB of Kingston PC800 RDRAM, a 128MB Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600, and a 120GB Western Digital SE 7200 rpm hard drive. The ABS is built around an ABIT IH7II motherboard, and it sports no bells or whistles, but it's very solid and has everything that you need to get your game on something fierce. Our test machine got the second-fastest 3DMark2001 SE score of 11190 at 1024x768x32 and did extremely well on every other test. I'd make two key changes: Give it a 22-inch monitor and an nForce-based DDR motherboard. But for the quality, you cannot beat the price—the D508 ABS was the least expensive machine in this lineup.

BUY IF you want a well-built, no-frills machine that performs right up there with the big boys at a price that a normal person can afford.

SKIP IF you're reluctant to buy a machine from a new company with as-yet unproven tech support, or you want something that's a pretty color.

VICIOUS PC PREDATOR

URL: **www.viciouspc.com**

PRICE: **$2,699**

★★★½☆

Like ABS, Vicious PC is also a new kid on the block. Looking to combine a good price with performance, Vicious equipped the Predator with an AMD Athlon XP 2100+ CPU, 512MB of PC2700 DDR RAM, an eVGA 128MB Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 graphics card, and dual 40GB Maxtor ATA-133 7200-rpm 740DX hard drives in a RAID array.

With the complete system coming in at $2,699, it's hard to not recommend the Predator. Vicious overclocked the machine a bit, but that didn't seem to affect its overall stability. Although not the fastest machine in this roundup, the Vicious Predator was definitely fast enough for gaming needs. Its 3DMark2001 SE score of 10954 at 1024x768x32 is perfectly respectable alongside the 10990 that the Voodoo machine scored—and the Voodoo costs $5,500.

The Predator's performance and stability come as no shock when you consider the quality of the components it ships with: an MSI KT3 Ultra-ARU motherboard and Klipsch ProMedia 5.1 speakers, just to name a few. The machine that I tested came with a no-name multimedia keyboard that worked just fine, but as usual, I would have preferred a Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro. I also would have liked a bigger monitor, like the 22-inch NEC FE1250+, but you can order one from Vicious' Website. We haven't heard anything about the quality of the technical support, so it looms as a big variable. But all in all, for a relatively new outfit, Vicious put together a very good machine.

BUY IF you want a fast, well-built machine, but you're on a budget.

SKIP IF you want the absolute fastest rig available or you'd prefer to buy from a company with a proven track record.

VICIOUS PC PREDATOR

By the Numbers

MANUFACTURER	Dell	Alienware	Falcon Northwest	Voodoo Computers	ABS Computers	Vicious PC
MODEL	Dimension 8200	Area 51	Mach V	Voodoo F-Class	D508 ABS Digital 1	Predator
System Only	N/A	$3,357	$3,195	$4,405	N/A	N/A
Complete System	$2,931	$5,439	$4,285	$5,500	$2,249	$2,699
Operating System	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Prof. Edition	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition
Motherboard	Dell Intel 850-based	Intel D850MV2	ASUS A7N266 nForce	MSI KT3 Ultra-ARU, ATA-133 with USB 2.0	ABIT TH7II	MSI KT3 Ultra-ARU, ATA-133 with USB 2.0
Processor	2.4GHz Intel Pentium 4	2.4GHz Intel Pentium 4	AMD Athlon XP 2100+	AMD Athlon XP 2100+	2.4GHz Intel Pentium 4	AMD Athlon XP 2100+
Memory	512MB PC800 RDRAM	1GB PC800 RDRAM	512MB PC2100 DDR RAM	512MB PC2700 DDR RAM (available with PC3000)	512MB Kingston [illegible]	512MB PC2700 DDR RAM
Graphics Card	128MB Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	128MB Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	128MB Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	128MB Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	128MB Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	128MB Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600
Monitor	Dell 19" P992	Two NEC MultiSync FE1250+	Viewsonic P2201 22"	NEC MultiSync FE1250+	Hitachi 19" CM715	NEC MultiSync FE950+
Hard Drive	120GB 7200 rpm	Dual 120GB Western Digital with 8MB cache in RAID array	160GB (four 40GB IBM DeskStar 120GXP 7200 rpm ATA in RAID array)	120GB Western Digital SE 7200 rpm	120GB 7200 rpm	Dual 40GB Maxtor ATA-133 7200-rpm 7400X in RAID array
DVD-ROM Drive	16X DVD/48X CD-ROM	Samsung 16X DVD/48X CD-ROM	Toshiba 16X DVD/48X CD-ROM	Pioneer trayless 16X DVD/40X CD-ROM	Pioneer 16X DVD/48X CD-ROM	Toshiba 16X DVD/48X CD-ROM
CD-RW Drive	Dell 24/10/40A	Plextor 40/12/40A	Plextor 40/12/40A	Plextor 40/12/40A	Plextor 40/12/40A	Sony CRX161I 40/12/40A
Sound Card (Creative Labs)	Sound Blaster Live Value	Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer	Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer	Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer	Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer	Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer
Speakers	Harmon/Kardon HK-695	Klipsch ProMedia 5.1	Klipsch ProMedia 5.1	Klipsch ProMedia 5.1	Klipsch ProMedia 5.1	Klipsch ProMedia 5.1
Mouse	Logitech Optical Mouse USB	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer 3.0	Logitech MouseMan Dual Optical	Microsoft Intellimouse Optica	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer 3.0
Keyboard	Dell Performance USB	Microsoft Office	Microsoft Internet Pro	IBM Preferred USB with hub	Microsoft Internet	Eagle Touch Internet
Miscellany	24 hour onsite service	Plantronics DSP USB digital headset, GearGrip-Pro carrying harness	Adaptec IEEE/USB 2.0 combo card, Promise Fastrack ATA-100 RAID	GearGrip-Pro carrying harness, upgrade insurance, three-year Absolute Satisfaction warranty	N/A	N/A
GRAPHICS CLOCK FREQUENCIES						
Core Clock Frequency	300MHz	315MHz	310MHz	315MHz	300MHz	300MHz
Memory Clock Frequency	650MHz	715MHz	665MHz	730MHz	650MHz	[illegible]
BENCHMARKS						
Quake III: Arena 1024x768x16	236	[illegible]	205	207	237	[illegible]
Quake III: Arena 1024x768x32	231	243	204	204	[illegible]	207
Quake III: Arena 1600x1200x32	[illegible]	134	134	141	105	[illegible]
Unreal Tournament 1024x768x16	66	66	68	64	[illegible]	66
Expendable 1024x768x16	118	114	120	120	109	124
Expendable 1024x768x32	113	113	119	118	109	121
Re-Volt 1024x768x16	323	338	285	272	324	283
Re-Volt 1024x768x32	329	337	286	273	325	283
Re-Volt 1600x1200x32	220	221	229	241	[illegible]	234
Serious Sam: TSE 1024x768x16	149	150	148	143	152	150
Serious Sam: TSE 1024x768x32	146	155	136	144	147	145
Serious Sam: TSE 1600x1200x32	111	115	115	117	94	115
Geomean (GameGauge) Score	162	[illegible]	158	158	156	160
[illegible] 3DMark2000	[illegible]	340	331	333	324	336
MadOnion.com 3DMark2001 SE 1024x768x32	10922	11561	10754	10990	11190	10954
MadOnion.com 3DMark2001 SE 1600x1200x32	7150	7215	7596	7862	7553	7834
MadOnion.com SYSmark2002 Rating 1024x768x32	[illegible]	[illegible]	187	236	187	238
MadOnion.com SYSmark2002 Internet Content Creation 1024x768x32	306	311	225	225	311	221
MadOnion.com SYSmark2002 Office Productivity 1024x768x32	185	178	[illegible]	[illegible]	179	159
[illegible]						
Total Score (Geomean)	660	672	606	[illegible]	663	607
Speed/Performance	3.5	5.0	4.5	4.5	5.0	4.5
Price	5.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	5.0	5.0
Component Quality	3.5	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.0	4.0
Reputation	5.0	4.0	5.0	5.0	1.0	1.0
TOTAL	4.3	4.0	4.1	4.1	3.8	3.6

Dell Inspiron 8200

It's hot and heavy, but don't put it on your lap By Ken Feinstein

MANUFACTURER Dell
URL www.dell.com
PRICE $3,126

SPECS 1.7GHz Pentium 4-M, 60GB hard drive, 512MB DDR RAM, Nvidia GeForce4 Go, DVD/CD-RW drive, 15-inch Ultra XGA display

Dell's Inspiron 8200 is big, bold, and beautiful. All that brawn comes at the price of expense, heat, and size, but there's no denying one simple fact: This is by far the fastest notebook I've ever tested.

Calling the Dell Inspiron 8200 a laptop is a bit of a stretch. It's heavy at 7.71 pounds, measures 1.75 inches thick, and gets hot, especially when running graphics-intensive games. If a guy put it on his lap, he might jeopardize the family jewels, and the buzz of the dual cooling fans in back is reminiscent of the sound of jet engines. So, let's just call this a portable PC and leave it at that.

Fortunately, you get plenty in return for that heft and heat. Features include a DVD/CD-RW combo drive, 60GB hard drive, and built-in floppy drive. It offers practically every connectivity option in existence, including a modem and Ethernet adapter, an IEEE 1394 (FireWire) port, two USB ports, and even a built-in 802.11b wireless network adapter. So much comes standard that we're not sure what's left for the two empty PC Card slots.

But the really hot stuff, literal and figurative, is under the hood. The notebook's Pentium 4-M CPU runs at 1.7GHz with a 400MHz processor system bus and 512MB of 266MHz DDR memory. Couple that with Nvidia's GeForce4 440 Go graphics card with 64MB of DDR memory, and you get astounding game performance. *Quake III* ran at an absolutely seamless 65 frames per second at 1600x1200x32, and on MadOnion's 3DMark2001 SE Pro, the system scored 4990. That's well above the 3702 score of Toshiba's impressive Satellite 5005-S507 Pentium III-M notebook (reviewed in our June issue), which uses the 32MB GeForce4 Go.

I'm not the biggest fan of 15-inch Ultra XGA displays on notebooks. Their 1600x1200 native resolution makes text and graphics too small on the desktop, and I end up using Windows display

The really hot stuff, literal and figurative, is under the Inspiron 8200's hood.

tweaks (like larger fonts or higher DPI settings) to simulate a lower-resolution display. But using the Dell's Ultra XGA display combined with the GeForce4 Go changed my view a bit. The GeForce4 Go has the power to run games well even at 1600x1200, making use of the LCD's clarity and vibrant colors to deliver a truly all-encompassing experience.

Ergonomically, Dell got almost everything right with the Inspiron 8200. As you'd expect from a notebook in this class, it offers both an eraser-style pointing stick in the middle of the keyboard, as well as a touchpad down below. There are extra buttons above the function keys for adjusting volume and music playback, and the speakers deliver a crisp, if slightly tinny, sound with outstanding stereo separation.

If I have one gripe, it is with the location of the network and modem ports, on the left side near the handrest. If you are brave enough to put this behemoth on your lap, the port area is likely to bang against your leg; near the back would be a better location. I also found the press-in latch that opens the notebook difficult to use.

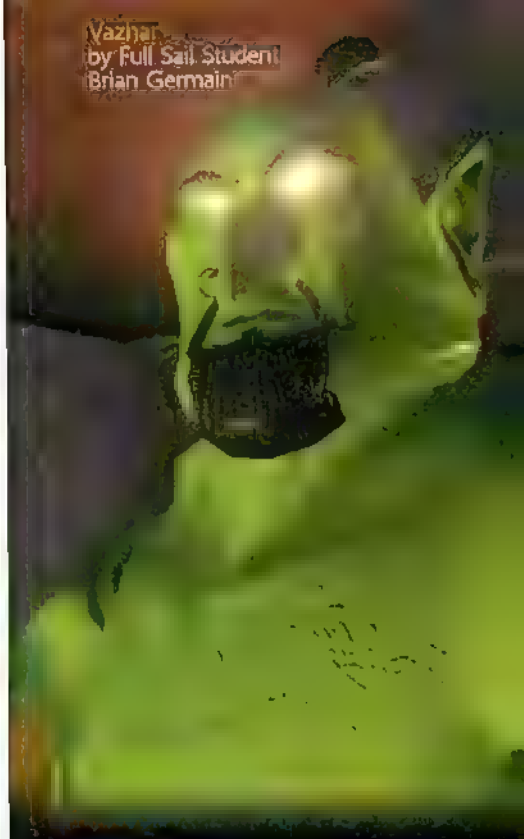
The latest in technology doesn't come cheap; the fully loaded Inspiron 8200 test unit priced out at $3,126. But when it comes to performance and features, this notebook can put almost any desktop to shame.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

Dell's Inspiron 8200 notebook is so wicked fast, you won't mind the bulk.

By the Numbers

MANUFACTURER	Toshiba	Dell
Model	Satellite 5005-S507	Inspiron 8200
Price	$1,999	$3,126
Operating System	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition
Processor	1.1GHz Pentium III	1.7GHz Pentium 4
Memory	512MB SDRAM	512MB PC2100 DDR RAM
Graphics Card	32MB (VRAM) Nvidia GeForce4 440 Go	64MB DDR RAM Nvidia GeForce4 440 Go
Display	15" Ultra XGA 1600x1200 TFT	15" Ultra XGA 1600x1200 TFT
Hard Drive	38GB hard drive	60GB ATA-100 5400 rpm
DVD/CD-ROM Drive	DVD-ROM/CD-RW combo drive	8X DVD-ROM/CD-RW combo drive
Speakers	Harmon/Kardon speakers with built-in subwoofer	N/A
Miscellaneous slots	SD and SmartMedia, two PCMCIA Type II or one Type III PC Card, three USB ports, IEEE 1394 port, IR port	Two PCMCIA Type II or one Type III PC Card, two USB ports, IEEE 1394 port, IR port
Weight	6.99 pounds	7.71 pounds
BENCHMARKS		
Quake III: Arena 1024x768x16	100	146
Quake III: Arena 1024x768x32	100	141
Quake III: Arena 1600x1200x32	63	65
Unreal Tournament 1024x768x16	45	40
Expendable 1024x768x16	60	82
Expendable 1024x768x32	59	82
Re-Volt 1024x768x16	124	216
Re-Volt 1024x768x32	124	184
Re-Volt 1600x1200x32	79	84
Serious Sam: TSE 1024x768x16	67	93
Serious Sam: TSE 1024x768x32	64	83
Serious Sam: TSE 1600x1200x32	38	41
Geekbench (GeekMarks) Score	72	92
3DWinMark2000 1.1	132	160
3DMark2001 SE Pro 1024x768x32	3702	4990
3DMark2001 SE Pro 1600x1200x32	N/A	2921



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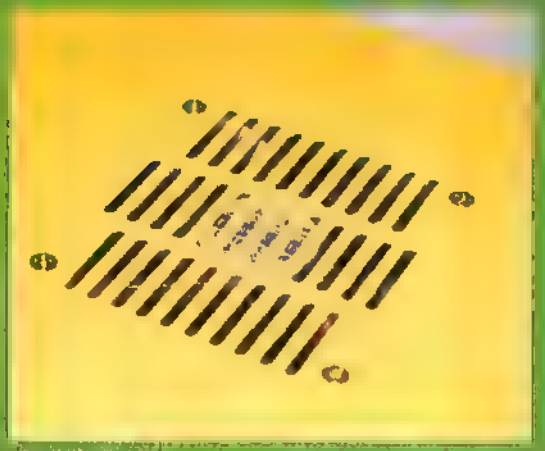
How To: Keep Your System Cool

By Joel Durham, Jr.

Overclockers and tweakers take note: The more you clock up your gear, the more important it is to cool it. There's a lot of online discussion about CPU cooling, video card cooling, memory cooling, and other component-specific stuff. What it all boils down to is that you have to exchange the hot air near your components for cool air in the computer case.

STEP #1

CPU AND VIDEO COOLERS All modern CPUs and video processors need coolers. Although every system comes with a stock cooler and every video card with its own heat sink/fan, you might want to upgrade them, especially if you overclock your components. Several companies, including Thermaltake and Arctic Cooling, specialize in CPU and video coolers. Put thermal compound between the chip and the heat sink to maximize heat transfer.



STEP #2

ADD FANS If your case has fan mounts, you can add extra fans. Measure the diameter of the mounts in your case so you purchase the appropriate size. Fans are available at most computer stores. For maximum airflow, go for high-rpm fans, but be warned: The faster the rotation, the louder the fan. Check your motherboard to determine whether it has three-pin power adapters for case fans, and if so, how many; if it doesn't have enough, make sure you buy fans with four-pin power supply connectors.

STEP #3

AIRFLOW AND DUST The power supply fan blows air out, so you'll want to install an intake fan in the front of the case if possible. Air being pushed into the case brings dust along with it, so use a filter (available from cooling specialists like CoolerGuys.com or FrozenCPU.com). If you install multiple fans, make sure they move more air into the case than out of it. This will prevent a vacuum from being created inside the case, causing the ambient cooling holes to suck air (and dust) into the case.

STEP #4

SLOT COOLERS If you want to cool your expansion cards, look into a card cooler. They typically contain a pair of fans and mount right across the expansion slots. If you wish to concentrate your cooling on a single card—say, an overclocked video card—you can use a slot cooler: They mount in an expansion slot and blow right onto the card they're aimed at. If you're really into overclocking, look into Peltier or water-based cooling systems. They're complicated and expensive, but they'll keep your system cold enough to chill a beer right in the case!

Labtec Axis-712

Not to be taken aurally By Joel Durham, Jr.

Manufacturer: Labtec
Web: www.labtec.com
Price: $59.99

Requirements: USB-enabled Macintosh (OS 9.0.4 or higher) or Windows (98, 98SE, 2000, ME, or XP)

Labtec's latest pile of headsets is topped by the Axis-712, a compact set with high-quality sound and a terrific microphone. It's everything a receptionist might dream of, but gamers hooked on the latest 3D sound standards will find it overpriced and lacking.

The Axis-712 is comfortable and sounds terrific. Though strongest in the midrange, it replicates treble with a delicate touch and cranks out commendable bass. It has a bulky module in the middle of its cord that houses the volume control and a microphone mute toggle. The foam-covered, noise canceling microphone records clear vocals with little breath or background noise. The USB interface allows the system to take over audio duties from a PC's sound card.

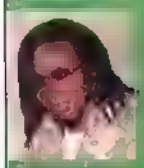
Unfortunately, the Axis-712 lacks a DSP, so it relies on the system CPU for most of its audio processing. This has a detrimental effect on game performance. A 3D AudioBench test comparing the Axis with a Philips Acoustic Edge sound card showed higher CPU dependence from the Axis. A typical result: An eight-voice, 16-bit streaming DirectSound3D audio test at 44.1KHz used 1.76 percent of the processor with the Acoustic Edge and 3.22 percent with the Axis-712.

We also compared benchmarks for *Quake III: Arena*, which uses a sophisticated audio engine. With graphics on their fastest settings and sound set for the highest quality, *Arena* ran at 188.6 frames per second with the Acoustic Edge and 174.3 with the Axis-712—a difference of almost 8 percent.

But besides the numbers, the gaming experience with the Axis-712 just doesn't compare to having a set of analog headphones connected to a good sound card. Because this headset lacks hardware support for 3D audio standards, it's harder to pinpoint the sources of in-game 3D sounds. The Axis-712 is fine for music and voice over IP, but it's not to be mistaken for gaming gear.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

Provides high-quality sound, but the heavy processor dependence affects game performance, and there's no hardware 3D audio support.



WIL POWER

By William O'Neal

Where Is All This Technology Taking Us?

It's kind of funny, but I'm writing this editorial on the Dell Inspiron 8200 that we review in this issue. I'm staying home with my son tomorrow and while he plays games on the Xbox, I'll work on this month's hardware section, play some *Counter-Strike*, and finish *Medal of Honor*, all on this very laptop.

The funny part is that the laptop arrived in a month when I have six excellent desktop machines scattered throughout my office, the CGW lab, and assorted cubicles here at Ziff Davis. Six top-of-the-line machines, all of which come with 128MB Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 graphics cards, and either AMD Athlon XP 2100+ or 2.4GHz Intel Pentium 4 CPUs! But with all of this gaming horsepower at my disposal, I'm content playing the games that I want to play on a 1.7GHz Pentium 4 laptop with a 64MB GeForce4 Go graphics card. It shouldn't come as news to anyone that this industry is awash with technological overkill, but this is ridiculous.

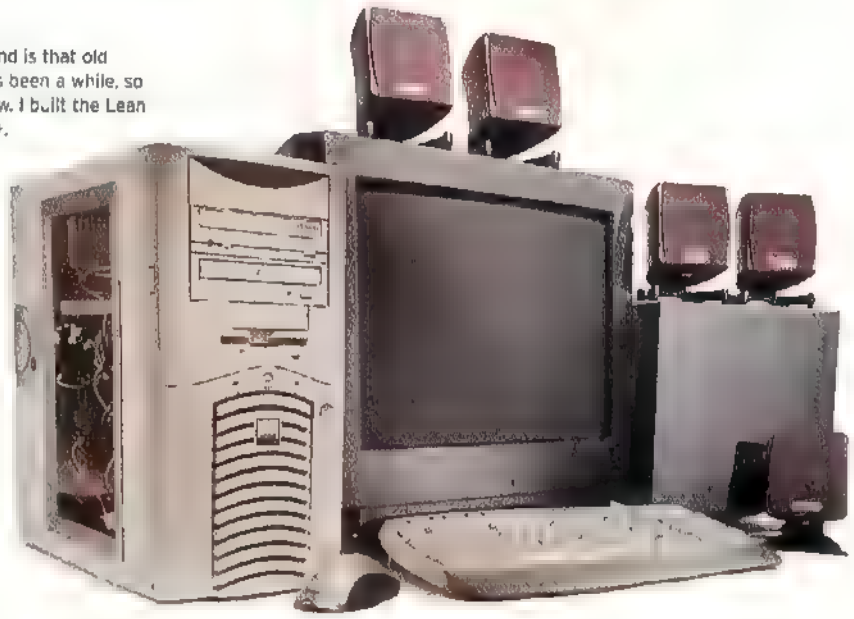
With the exception of *Medal of Honor Allied Assault*, my favorite games are some of the most low-tech titles around. *Half-Life Counter-Strike* is a modification of a game that's nearly four years old. And *Half-Life* itself was built with the *Quake* engine. My next favorite title (if you can even call it that) is *Dominos* on Yahoo! (games.yahoo.com), and all that requires is a 28.8Kbps modem and a Java-enabled browser.

Which makes me wonder about the purpose of all this technology. Will we ever reach a point when we will no longer need to upgrade? Of course, that's a rhetorical question. Thanks to those backroom deals that Microsoft has made with hardware vendors like Intel and Dell, there will always be a need to upgrade. It's just that I'm still waiting for the games to catch up to the technology.

Killer Rigs

Two recipes for building your ultimate gaming machine

By William O'Neal



Rejoice! Back by popular demand is that old favorite the Lean Machine, it's been a while, so let's talk about what's in it now. I built the Lean Machine around an AMD Athlon XP 1800+. Considering how fast this CPU is, it's amazing that you can get your hands on one for less than $200. Rounding out the Lean Machine is 256MB of Crucial PC2100 DDR RAM, VisionTek's 64MB GeForce3 Ti 200, an ASUS A7N266-E nForce motherboard, a 7200-rpm 20GB hard drive from Maxtor, and Windows XP Home Edition.

Readers are probably wondering why I chose the GeForce3 Ti 200 over faster GPUs. Well, price. The GeForce3 Ti 200 is about as fast as the original GeForce3s and, well, they're fast enough.

The Power Rig hasn't undergone many changes since last month except that I replaced the small IBM DeskStar hard drive that you all were so pissed off about with a 7200-rpm 80GB offering by Maxtor.

As far as performance is concerned, I'm pleased with both of these machines. While the Lean Machine's 3DMark2001 SE Pro score of 6124 seems small next to the Power Rig's whopping 10513, remember that it wasn't long ago that a 3DMark2001 score in the 6000 range was frigging amazing.

You'll also notice that I'm now benchmarking machines with *Serious Sam: The Second Encounter* and MadOnion's SYSmark2002. Many of you have rightfully pointed out that there's more to a system's power than frame rates, and I agree—so keep your letters.

POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
CPU	2.4GHz Pentium 4	$562
Memory	512MB Crucial PC2100 DDR RAM	$200
Graphics Card	128MB VisionTek GeForce4 Ti 4600	$400
Motherboard	Intel D845BG	$150
Case	Antec SX-635	$100
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$20
Hard Drive	80GB Maxtor D740X Ultra DMA133 7200 rpm	$150
CD-RW Drive	Plextor 40/12/40A	$180
DVD-ROM Drive	Pioneer DVD500-M 16/40 ATAPI	$75
Monitor	22" NEC MultiSync FE1250+	$700
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro	$45
Mouse	Wireless IntelliMouse Explorer	$65
Sound Card	Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer	$100
Speakers	Cambridge SoundWorks MegaWorks 510D	$350
Operating System	Windows XP Home Edition	$200
TOTAL		$3,297

LEAN MACHINE

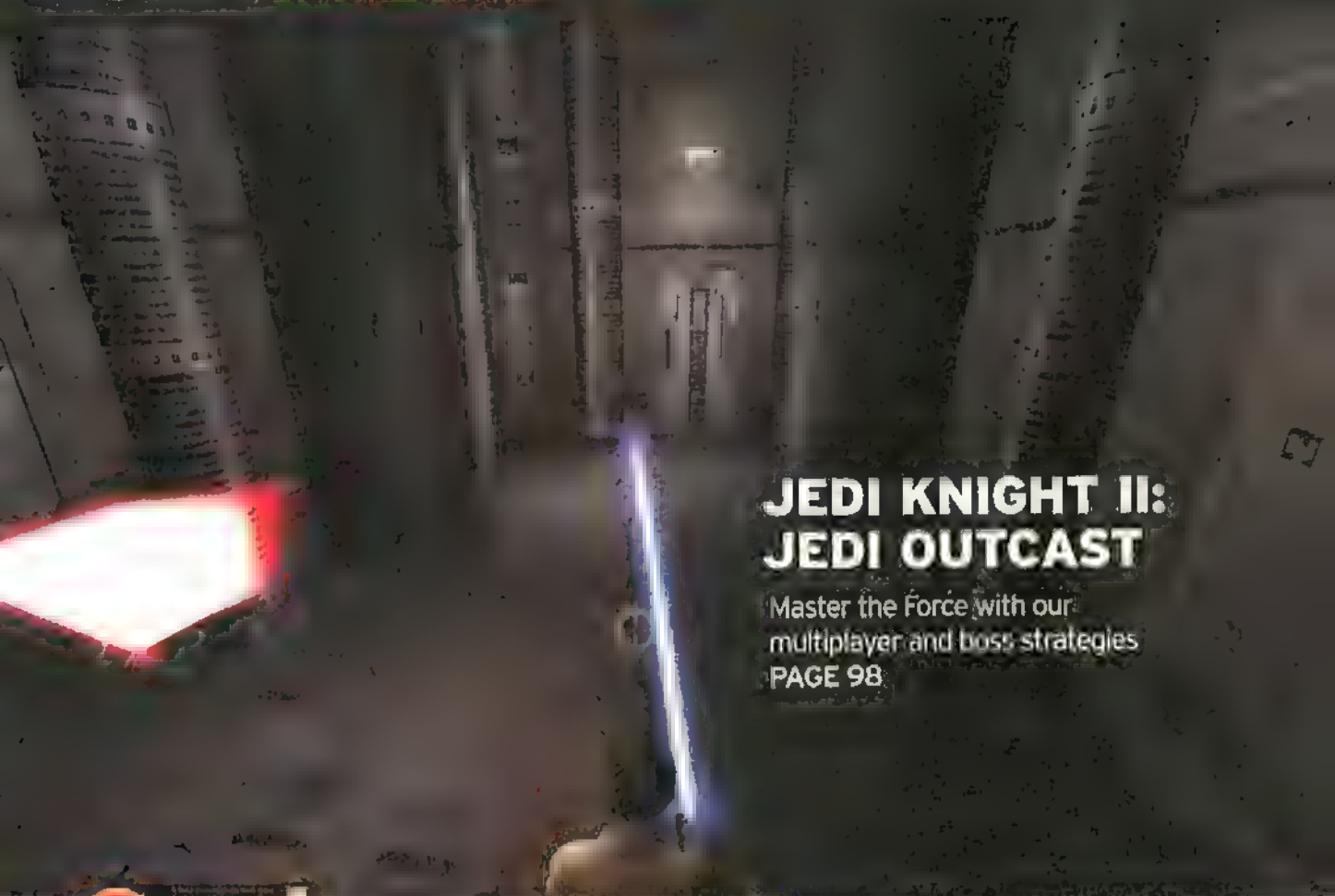
COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
CPU	AMD Athlon XP 1800+	$150
Memory	256MB Crucial PC2100 DDR RAM	$100
Graphics Card	VisionTek 64MB GeForce3 Ti 200	$200
Motherboard	ASUS A7N266-E nForce	$175
Case	Antec SX-635	$100
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$20
Hard Drive	20GB Maxtor D740X Ultra DMA133 7200 rpm	$80
CD-RW Drive	Plextor 12/10/40A	$100
DVD-ROM Drive	None	N/A
Monitor	19" Hitachi CM715	$300
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard	$30
Mouse	Microsoft IntelliMouse Optical	$45
Sound Card	Onboard nForce 5.1 Audio	N/A
Speakers	Logitech Z-340	$50
Operating System	Windows XP Home Edition	$200
TOTAL		$1,550

There's more to a system's power than frame rates.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD T OSEJO

Gamer's Edge

Winning for dummies Edited by Thierry Nguyen



JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST

Master the Force with our multiplayer and boss strategies

PAGE 98

READERS:
We're now offering *Dungeon Siege* as the prize for the next few Dirty Tricks. Keep sending them in!

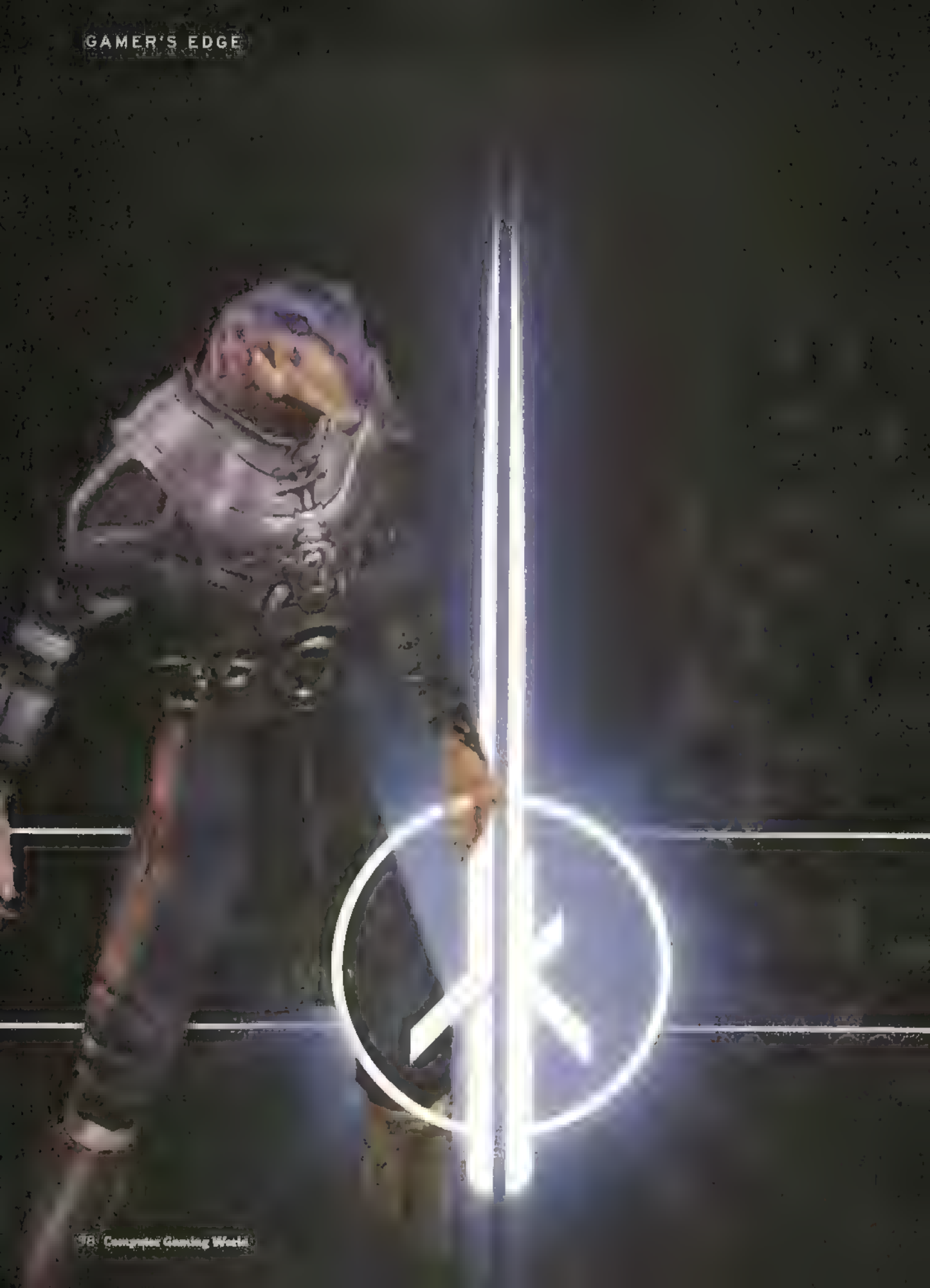
Dirtiest Trick o' the Month

Two months in a row we've gotten good tricks for current games—exactly what we're looking for. Here's one for all you budding Dark Force Jedi in multiplayer Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast. *You'll find a few more tips in our JKII guide on page 98.*

My dirty trick is a simple but fun one for the new *Star Wars* game *Jedi Outcast*. The game is filled with what many people consider cheap tricks (thanks to the wonderful Force powers you can use and abuse), and I've found one that seems to really irritate other players. You'll need a server that allows both weapons and Force powers. Customize your powers to your liking, but max out Force Grip. Force Grip is great for dropping people off ledges, but it doesn't do much damage on its own. So once you're in the game, run around and find a nice assault sentry (those portable turrets that you can drop to fire on enemies). When you have the turret, find a room that isn't too big but still has enough space to move around. When your unlucky victim enters, drop the turret and use Force Grip on him. Hold him between you and the turret (get good at circle strafing so they can't Force Push their way out of your grip). Caught in your grip, he can't take any action against the turret, and it usually doesn't take many shots to his back to kill him. At worst, if he breaks your grip with Force power, he'll usually try to destroy the turret, so use that time to take a strong swing at his back—if done correctly, this almost always results in a kill for you and irritation for the victim.

—James Christie

You just snagged yourself the last copy of Medal of Honor Allied Assault. *Take a break from shooting imperial stormtroopers and go fight some real stormtroopers.*



CGW and Raven help you reveal your inner Jedi By Thierry Nguyen

Who better than the developers to explain the evolution from a fledgling padawan to a full-scale Jedi knight? We asked Raven to help us take out bosses in the single-player game and master lightsaber combat in multiplayer.

WARNING: SPOILERS FOLLOW!

Jedi Bullet-Time

One technique is almost fail-safe in any sort of Jedi encounter, whether you're up against an apprentice to a Jedi master, a Reborn Jedi, or a Shadow Trooper: Force Speed.

Even at its lowest level, Force Speed can significantly boost your fighting skills against any Jedi you might have to fight in the game.

The increased speed and perception allow you to step quickly behind your target and attack mercilessly. Late in the game, we could easily take out Reborn and Shadow Troopers by using Force Speed, going into the Strong stance (read more about that later), and slicing from behind. Judicious use of Force Speed is the best aid in single-player duels.

Powering Down Power Armor

Programmer Mike Gummelt had this to say about taking down Galak and his power-armor:

Galak's armor provides two layers of

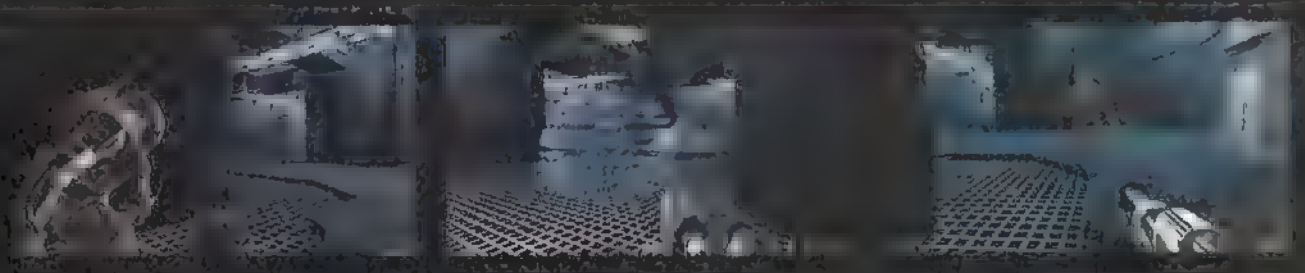
defense. The outer shield is generated from a small antenna on the back of the armor that rises up behind the helmet. The shield will deflect energy blasts and will disrupt a thrown lightsaber. It is very resistant to the lightsaber in general but is vulnerable to concussive (explosive) damage and has to recharge for a while if it's taken down.

Here's the trick: When the shield goes down, destroy the antenna to stop the shield from coming back up. If you don't, the shield will come up and you'll have to take it down again. Each time it goes down, it takes longer to recharge.

The second layer of defense is the armor itself, which is the opposite of the shield; it offers only normal protection against energy blasts but is highly resistant to concussive blasts and explosions. The armor is laced with cortosis and so is also somewhat resistant to the lightsaber.

People use many tactics to defeat Galak. Some sit on the rafters and use a rocket launcher to take down the shield and then use the sniper rifle to take out the antenna. Others choose the alt-fire of the flechette gun and then use Force Speed when the shield goes down; these players run behind Galak and take out the antenna with the main fire of the flechette. There are many combinations you can use to beat him, so be creative.

STAR WARS
JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST™



Defeating Desann

There are several ways to take down Desann. The *CGW* way is to be the best lightsaber dueler you can be; everyone at *CGW* editorial who finished the game beat Desann using only their Force powers and lightsaber skills—those, and a lot of reloads. Extensive use of Force Speed (especially when Desann uses Saber Throw), coupled with some good Force Pushes should eventually wear him down.

Activating the Force fountain can make things easier by giving you 10 seconds of invulnerability. Combine that with Force Speed, and you become a lethal, untouchable machine. The fountain regenerates roughly every minute, so you can repeatedly become temporarily invincible during the battle.

You can be even cheaper and use the scenery to kill him: Make one of the four pillars in the lower corner fall on him. The best way to do this is to keep dodging him while using Force Lightning on the pillar until it's about to fall (you'll notice the support getting really thin after beating on it). Then use the Force fountain to get invulnerability, line Desann up, and deliver the final blow. It's cheap, but it works.

The Padawan's Guide to the Art of Lightsaber Combat

"This is the weapon of a Jedi knight. Not as clumsy or random as a blaster. An elegant weapon for a more civilized time." –Obi-Wan Kenobi

In the hands of a novice, the lightsaber is but a clumsy tool, as much a danger to the wielder as to the opponent. In the hands of a Jedi Master, the lightsaber can be like an artist's brush, elegant and powerful. Those without knowledge of lightsaber use should not wield one.

COMMAND: Forward + Attack or Backward + Attack
ATTACK TYPE: Top-down hack
DESCRIPTION: A fast, deadly attack. If it hits, it can inflict a lot of damage as it passes through a large amount of the target's mass. But if the target is moving, this attack may be hard to use. It is best for hitting targets above or below you.

COMMAND: Strafe Right or Left + Attack
ATTACK TYPE: Horizontal swipe
DESCRIPTION: A slower attack, this gives you the best chance of hitting an upright enemy, even if they're moving laterally. In this move, you will swing from the right (or left) while sidestepping to the left (or right). This is useful for hitting an enemy who is passing but not for one who is jumping or ducking.

COMMAND: Forward + Strafe Left or Right + Attack.
ATTACK TYPE: Downward diagonal slash
DESCRIPTION: This attack is best for enemies who are close to you and aren't moving too much. It doesn't have as much range as the horizontal swipes, but it is faster and has a good chance of hitting during close-quarters lightsaber combat.

COMMAND: Backward + Strafe Left or Right + Attack.
ATTACK TYPE: Upward diagonal slash
DESCRIPTION: This attack is excellent for surprising an enemy, especially one who's charging at you. Execute this move while running backward. It's also good against enemies who are crouching or jumping, as blocking an attack from below is harder than blocking one from above.

Combat Styles

While the path of each attack is always as described above, the strength, speed, and range of these attacks varies depending on which lightsaber combat style you use. As you progress, you will gain all three combat styles. You first get the Medium style, then the Fast, and finally the Strong. You can cycle through these with the Lightsaber Style key (L by default) that you find in the Weapon Buttons configuration menu.

MEDIUM LIGHTSABER COMBAT STYLE
This is the classic combat style as used by Jedi such as Luke Skywalker and the young Obi-Wan Kenobi. The attacks are of a medium speed and range and do a decent amount of

SPECIAL MOVES

COMMAND: Backward + Attack
CONDITIONS: Standing, in Fast style, enemy directly behind you
ATTACK TYPE: Backward stab
DESCRIPTION: Use this attack when your enemy is directly behind you and in close. It's difficult to time this move right, but it's a fast and devastating stab and cannot be blocked. You can use this attack only when standing and using the Fast style.

COMMAND: Backward + Attack
CONDITIONS: In Medium or Strong style, enemy behind you
ATTACK TYPE: 180-degree spin, back swipe
DESCRIPTION: Execute this attack when an enemy is behind you. It's a bit slow, but it's very powerful and cannot be blocked. This attack can be used only with the Medium or Strong saber styles. You can use this move from either a standing or crouching position.

damage. Some of the moves incorporate spins. A Jedi can chain three to five of these attacks in a row. Because of the great range of motion involved in Medium-style swings, you cannot run at full speed when using these attacks. Medium attacks can be blocked and rarely break a block unless the enemy's defensive skills are exceptionally weak. This style is the best for fighting multiple Reborn enemies.

FAST LIGHTSABER COMBAT STYLE
This style, used by Qui-Gon Jinn and the older Obi-Wan Kenobi, is fast and efficient but somewhat limited in range. The short, quick motions allow for many repeated attacks and quick follow-ups, but the damage inflicted is low because strikes tend to glance off the target.

Attacks in this style never incorporate fancy moves such as spins. There is very little movement in Fast combat, so you can run at full speed when using it. But due to the weakness of the attacks, they are easily parried and never break a block. This style is best used when you're fighting a lot of enemies who aren't using lightsabers.

STRONG LIGHTSABER COMBAT STYLE
This style, used sometimes by Darth Vader, makes use of big, powerful swings that aim to break through any defense. The attacks have great range and a big windup and follow-through (leaving you open to counter-attacks), but if you make contact, the enemy is unlikely to block the attack and will either have their lightsaber knocked aside—perhaps even out of their hand—or be knocked down by the strength of the blow. These attacks do quite a lot of damage. But the large motions of Strong attacks mean that they can almost never be chained and they slow you down considerably when you're running. It is wise to use this style when fighting a lone lightsaber-using enemy.

Blocks, Deflections, and Parries
Lightsaber attacks may not always be successful. Depending on the strength of the attack and the skill of the defender, attacks may be blocked, deflected, or even parried. You may defend against an attack only when your saber is in a ready or defensive pose.

A weak lightsaber attack that is defended by the enemy is considered blocked. The attacking lightsaber will bounce off the defending one and can thus quickly transition to another attack. The defending lightsaber can also transition to an attack immediately after the block, without any windup.

If an attacking lightsaber hits another at an obtuse angle, it may be deflected. The attack will continue in a trajectory a bit off from the original, and it will not damage the defender. The attacking saber can immediately transition into another attack. The defending lightsaber can transition into an attack directly from the block, without any windup.

If the attack is weak and the defender's skill is high, a parry is possible. In this case, the defender will knock the attacking lightsaber away (occasionally even knocking it out of the attacker's hands). The attacker, in this case, usually must wait a bit to recover before being able to attack or defend again. The defender can usually chain into an attack faster and take advantage of the opening.

Lightsaber Locks
If the attacker and defender have roughly equal strengths and skills, an attack-defense collision or the collision of two attacking lightsabers that hit at just the right angle can result in a lock.

When two lightsabers lock, the combatants are stuck pushing against each other. You must push against your opponent by repeatedly tapping your attack button in order to win the lock. The higher a combatant's offensive lightsaber skill, the harder they can push.

If you win a lightsaber lock, your opponent will be forced into a weak position for some time (perhaps even knocked down) and you can press the advantage by executing an attack relatively quickly.

If you lose a lightsaber lock, you will be at a great disadvantage. If possible, you should take evasive action. If you are knocked down, hold the jump key to get up quicker.

Saber Tossing
Throw your saber by hitting the alt-fire button, which is the right-side mouse button by default. The weapon will hit enemies and damage them until it hits a wall or reaches its maximum range or until a certain amount of time has passed, at which point it will return to your hand. It's possible for your saber to be knocked out of your control while

COMMAND: Tap Forward + Attack from Crouching
CONDITIONS: Must be crouching and ready and using Fast style
ATTACK TYPE: Forward lunge
DESCRIPTION: This maneuver is a weak attack with little chance of hitting, but it may nonetheless take your opponent by surprise. You suddenly lunge forward with an upward jabbing motion.

COMMAND: Tap Forward + Attack + Jump
CONDITIONS: Must be using Medium style, with the enemy directly in front of you
ATTACK TYPE: Flip over forward, attack downward
DESCRIPTION: A good evasive maneuver combined with a devastating attack from above. Execute this move when an enemy is directly in front of you and you are using the Medium lightsaber combat style. You'll flip up over the opponent's head and stab and slash downward as you pass over. It's a difficult move, but it can quickly end the confrontation if successful. Use it if you're surrounded by enemies and want to get out of the middle

COMMAND: Tap Forward + Attack + Jump from Standing
CONDITIONS: Must be standing and ready, using Strong style
ATTACK TYPE: Forward jump, downward hack
DESCRIPTION: A very strong, unblockable attack, almost always a finishing move. It is, however, very slow and you must jump to execute it, so its chance of success is pretty slim.

it's in flight. This can happen in a number of ways: The saber might be hit by another saber; it could get lost behind a door; you might be Force Gripped while guiding a thrown lightsaber; or you might turn your saber off while it's in flight. If your lightsaber is off and has dropped to the ground, simply maneuver until you can see it directly and hit your attack button; that will pull it back toward you. If you can't find your saber for an extended amount of time, it will eventually return to your inventory anyway.

There are three levels of lightsaber throws. Lightsaber Throw Level 1 will cause the saber to fly straight forward for a short distance and spin rather slowly. Lightsaber Throw Level 2 will cause your weapon to fly forward for a longer distance and allow it to be guided through the air. Simply rotate your view or move around to make the lightsaber move through the air as it flies forward. Lightsaber Throw Level 3 will let you guide your lightsaber to your enemies with great accuracy. You can keep the weapon in the air for as long as you hold the attack button and have Force power.

General Notes

In third-person view mode, when you slay a lightsaber combatant or are slain by one, the world will slow down and your view will spin around you. If you are fighting multiple opponents, use this downtime to plan your next move or avoid an imminent attack. You can still move and attack normally during this slow period. If you do not want the downtime, you can disable it in the Advanced Options menu.

You can toggle your lightsaber on and off by repeatedly hitting the button you bound to the lightsaber in the Weapon Buttons configuration menu. The lightsaber gives your position away with its light and the hum, so keep it under wraps until you start swinging.

Force Counters

Every power comes with a counter. Here's a handy list of when to use certain Force powers, straight from Raven:

PUSH: Used against any projectile weapon (missiles, thermal detonators, repeater secondary fire, flechette...).
FORCE GRIP: Minimizes effects of Force Pull based on your level of Force Push and the other player's level of Force Pull.
PULL: Minimizes effects of Force Push based on your level of Force Pull and the other player's level of Force Push.
FORCE ABSORB: This counters the effect of other Force powers and is especially useful against those who use Force Push/Pull techniques, Drain, Lightning, and Grip.
FORCE SEEING: Counters the effect of Jedi Mind Trick. Also, at Level 3, it counters the ability of a player to use the Tenloss secondary fire.

JUMPS AND ACROBATICS

Jumping is essential for evasion and pursuit during battle and for navigating your surroundings. There are three kinds of jumps: non-Force jumps, Force Jumps, and Force Flips.

If you do not have Force Jump ability, you will always do a non-Force jump, which is very short. After you obtain Force Jump, you can still do a non-Force jump by quickly tapping the jump button once.

Force Jump ability allows you to do Force Jumps and Force Flips (as well as some other maneuvers). To execute a Force Jump, press and hold the jump button. If you want to jump in a certain direction, run in that direction before jumping or tap the direction at the start of the jump. If you hold down the direction button during the jump, it will become a flip.

Note that when you land on someone from a jump, you will knock them down and immediately jump off (or roll off if you are holding in a crouch). You do have some control over the direction.

You may continue an attack into a jump or flip, and you may attack in the middle of either.

Acrobatic Maneuvers

Acrobatics are key for evading enemies, especially when you're outnumbered. Acrobatics also allow you to maneuver into a better fighting position.

COMMAND: Forward or Backward + Crouch or Strafe Right or Left + Crouch
CONDITIONS: Must be running or landing from a jump
MOVE TYPE: Roll
DESCRIPTION: You roll in the direction you press. This is an excellent evasive maneuver when you're fighting other lightsaber users (though not very effective when being shot at). Rolling from a jump may also help absorb some of the impact damage. Be careful, though, because once you enter a roll, your momentum will carry you forward until the roll stops. Note that you can still turn while rolling, so you can use it to outflank an enemy or avoid rolling off a cliff. You may not attack during a roll.

COMMAND: Forward + Double-Tap Jump
CONDITIONS: Must be facing a wall and have at least Force Jump Level 2
MOVE TYPE: Backflip off wall
DESCRIPTION: When facing a wall, hold Forward and tap the jump key twice. You will take a couple steps up the wall in front of you and flip backward away from the wall. This is a good move when you are being chased. You may end up behind the pursuer, leaving them open for an attack.

COMMAND: Step Left or Right + Jump
CONDITIONS: Standing still with a wall to one side, must have at least Force Jump Level 2
MOVE TYPE: Flip off wall to left or right
DESCRIPTION: You will take a couple steps up the wall to your right or left and then flip off the wall in the opposite direction. This is a good move when you are cornered.

COMMAND: Step Left or Right + Forward + Jump
CONDITIONS: Running, wall to left or right, must have at least Force Jump Level 2
MOVE TYPE: Running on a wall
DESCRIPTION: You will rise up off the ground and run along the wall for a short time. This move is good for getting over obstacles, pits, or enemies that block your path. If you hit the jump button again in the middle of this move, you will flip off the wall in the direction opposite of where you're running.

Europa Universalis II

Lifting the fog of war By John Fletcher

Combat is one of the great mysteries of *Europa Universalis II*. When armies clash you have no control over the action and simply watch little figures jab polearms at each other until the computer coughs up a winner. Players often don't even bother to watch a battle because the system seems so detached the documentation so general. I know my tech level of 35 is better than 28, but by how much? What effect does it have in real terms? How can I make knowledgeable combat decisions?

I put those questions to Johan Andersson, lead programmer on *EU2*. It turns out that combat is a very recognizable process. Each round consists of a fire phase and a shock phase, with the attacker going first in each phase. Strength points are tallied, a d10 is rolled, and the modified results are cross-referenced on combat resolution tables, or CRTs. Slow the game down enough and you can even see all this happening.

Technology, the Queen of Battle

Your technology level is the most important combat factor. There are 61 levels divided into six historical periods, from Medieval to Revolutionary. The first thing the computer looks at is the tech level of the opposing forces. A CRT is selected for each side according to the historical period. Later periods roll on progressively better CRTs. Also, each level has unique ratings for a variety of categories, including fire and shock combat (see sidebar). Cavalry shock rating is halved in marsh, forest, and mountain territories. Artillery fire rating is halved in marsh. The computer combines the number of troops with the ratings and modifies the CRT. You see this tally generalized as the power rating, located in the gray box on the combat resolution screen.

Technology modifies the CRT, but other modifiers affect the die roll. If one side has twice as much cavalry as its opponent and is in clear or desert territory, it receives +1. Any force attacking into a mountain territory or across a river receives a modifier of -1, as do forces that are disembarking in enemy-occupied territory. Wind modifies naval combat. Finally, leaders add their fire and shock values to the die roll. The final modifier appears next to the power rating.

Hearts and Minds

The final CRT result is called the damage value. This value includes both physical casualties and morale losses. The battle is decided when one side is completely eliminated or morale gives out (which usually happens before the army is destroyed). This is why often, especially at lower techs, a small force will defeat a far larger one: There's simply not enough morale to stay on the battlefield for very long. The formula for figuring morale is [(0.5 + Tech Level Morale) * Maintenance Value] + Religion Modifier + Policies Modifiers - Bankruptcy. The total range is a minimum value of .75 and a maximum of 7.5.

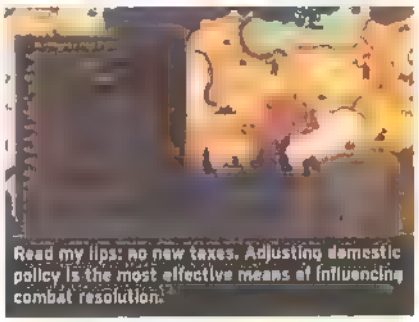
To demonstrate how vital the morale statistic is: In the scenario titled Napoleon's Ambition, if Russia goes bankrupt, her land forces will fight with a 4.75 morale value ((((0.5 + 5) * 1) + 0 - .25 - .5). By comparison, France has a 6.45 rating. Because the average loss per phase is 1.0, Russia is giving up almost two phases of combat before the first shot is even fired! If Russia maintained her armies at anything less than full funding, the results would be even worse. If maintenance were set at 75 percent, Russian morale would end up being a paltry 3.375. And with France at tech 57 and Russia at 48, not even Suvarov could win.

Macromanaging Micro Events

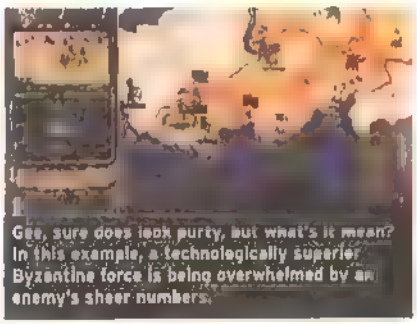
So what to do with all these numbers? Plenty, starting with the most powerful tool in the game: the domestic policy sliders. By shifting toward innovation and centralization, you can speed technological development by up to 33 percent. Higher tech equals better CRTs and shock, fire, and morale values. Other combinations let you dramatically affect morale, leader ratings, and unit cost. These sliders can help augment a strength or mitigate a weakness.

Modify tactics to suit your capabilities. In the example above, a single Russian army doesn't stand a chance against an equal number of French. But Russia, home of the serfs, raises armies at very cheap rates, so try launching successive waves at the French force. Keep a cavalry force in reserve so when you finally break the enemy, you can chase them while they still have poor morale.

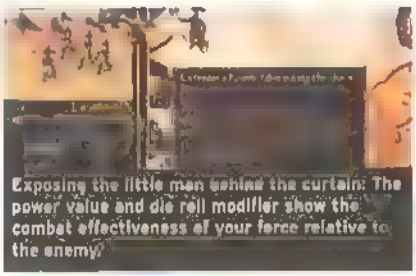
You may not be able to control the combat resolution routine, but by understanding it you can learn to master the art of war, *EU2*-style.



Read my lips: no new taxes. Adjusting domestic policy is the most effective means of influencing combat resolution.



Gee, sure does look purty, but what's it mean? In this example, a technologically superior Byzantine force is being overwhelmed by an enemy's sheer numbers.



Exposing the little man behind the curtain: The power value and die roll modifier show the combat effectiveness of your force relative to the enemy.

SOMETIMES I DON'T KNOW MY OWN STRENGTH!

One of the most difficult aspects of playing *EU2* is quantifying just what your tech level means on the battlefield. Paradox Entertainment provided *CGW* with the following ratings. Unfortunately, they did not provide any of the CRTs. I guess a company has to have its secrets.

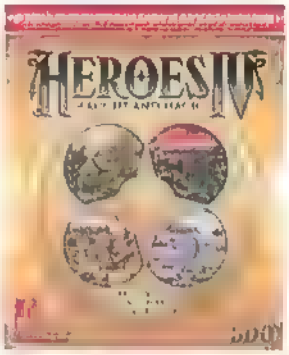
Tech Level	Infantry Fire/ Shock Value	Cavalry Fire/ Shock Value	Artillery Fire/ Shock Value	Morale Bonus	Period
1	0/50	0/500	0/450	1.6	Late Medieval
11	5/100	0/400	10000/1500	3	Renaissance
21	110/110	1/400	15000/2000	4	Baroque
31	125/130	5/420	40000/4500	4.25	War of Maneuver
41	145/145	5/450	45000/5250	5	War in Laces
51	200/175	7/400	60000/6500	5.5	Revolutionary
60	250/200	10/400	80000/9250	6	Revolutionary

Tech Level	Warship Fire/ Shock Value	Galley Fire/ Shock Value	Attrition Modifier	Morale Bonus	Period
1	0/50	0/100	1	1.5	Late Medieval
11	100/80	5/100	.8	1.75	Renaissance
21	110/100	10/100	.5	2.5	Baroque
31	190/150	30/150	.3	3	War of Maneuver
41	240/200	50/170	.3	3	War in Laces
51	260/230	50/170	.1	5	Revolutionary
60	280/230	50/170	.1	5	Revolutionary

A PRIMA GAMES EXCLUSIVE

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC IV

HERO TYPES: You can hire 11 basic types of hero in the course of a normal game. A warrior-style, might-based hero and a magician-style, magic-based hero are available for each of the six alignments except Might. Because Might heroes and creatures do not use spells, no magician-type hero is available for these armies.



OFFICIAL *HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC IV* PRIMA GUIDE

Hero Variations

Heroes begin with a couple of basic skills relating to their class. By adding skills from other classes, the hero can switch to a different class, gaining additional powers and abilities. Basic classes do not confer any special abilities, so gaining a new class is worthwhile.

Each time a hero gains a skill, either from a site on the map or by rising a level, there is a chance to change classes. The rating in a given class is the total number of levels in skills related to that class. Advanced classes in a skill subtract one from this total, and the archmage class subtracts three. If the heroes' ratings in the new class are higher than in the old class, they switch. Once promoted to a new class, a hero never reverts to a basic class. Consult the following tables for possible classes.

Basic Hero Types

Hero Type	Type	Alignment	Starting Skills
Archer	Might	Nature	Combat, Archery
Barbarian	Might	Might	Combat, Melee, Resistance
Death Knight	Might	Death	Tactics, Offense
Druid	Magic	Nature	Nature Magic, Herbalism
Knight	Might	Life	Tactics, Defense
Lord	Might	Order	Nobility, Estates
Mage	Magic	Order	Order Magic, Enchantment
Necromancer	Magic	Death	Death Magic, Occultism
Priest	Magic	Life	Life Magic, Healing
Sorcerer	Magic	Chaos	Chaos Magic, Conjuration
Thief	Might	Chaos	Scouting, Stealth

Additional Hero Classes

Primary Skill Set	Tactics	Combat	Scouting	Nobility	Life Magic	Order Magic	Death Magic	Chaos Magic	Nature Magic
Tactics	Knight/ Death Knight	General	Field Marshal	Lord Commander	Crusader	Illusionist	Reaver	Pyromancer	Warden
Combat	General	Barbarian/Archer	Ranger	Warlord	Paladin	Battle Mage	Assassin	Fireguard	Beastmaster
Scouting	Field Marshal	Ranger	Thief	Guildmaster	Prophet	Seer	Ninja	Fire Diviner	Bard
Nobility	Lord Commander	Warlord	Guildmaster	Lord	Cardinal	Wizard King	Dark Lord	Witch King	Beast Lord
Life	Crusader	Paladin	Prophet	Cardinal	Priest	Monk	Dark Priest	Heretic	Summoner
Order	Illusionist	Battle Mage	Seer	Wizard King	Monk	Mage	Shadow Mage	Wizard	Enchanter
Death	Reaver	Assassin	Ninja	Dark Lord	Dark Priest	Shadow Mage	Necromancer	Lich	Demonologist
Chaos	Pyromancer	Fireguard	Fire Diviner	Witch King	Heretic	Wizard	Lich	Sorcerer	Warlock
Nature	Warden	Beastmaster	Bard	Beast Lord	Summoner	Enchanter	Demonologist	Warlock	Druid
Special	Archmage	Any three Magic	–	–	–	–	–	–	–

As mentioned earlier, each of the special classes has a particular benefit. These are as follows:

Hero Class Special Abilities

Class	Special Ability
Archer	None
Archmage	+20% to spell effects
Assassin	Permanent Haste
Barbarian	None
Bard	Permanent Fortune
Battle Mage	+20% to Magic Fist, Ice Bolt
Beast Lord	+20% to summon wolf and summon white tiger
Beastmaster	+20% to summon wolf
Cardinal	+5% to Resurrection spells
Crusader	Permanent Mirth
Dark Lord	Inflicts sorrow with attacks
Dark Priest	Vampirism
Death Knight	None
Demonologist	+50% to demon summoning spells
Druid	None
Enchanter	+20% to summoning spells
Field Marshal	+10% to attacks by friendly creatures
Fire Diviner	+20% to fire spells
Fireguard	Fire Resistance
General	+1 to Morale
Guildmaster	Stun
Heretic	Ignores Ward abilities
Illusionist	+20% to Illusion spells
Knight	None
Lich	Aging
Lord	None
Lord Commander	+2 to Morale of friendly creatures
Mage	None
Monk	Chaos Ward
Necromancer	None
Ninja	Poison attack
Paladin	Death Ward
Priest	None
Prophet	Permanent spiritual armor
Pyromancer	Fire Shield
Ranger	+5 to ranged attack, ranged attack w/o bow or archery skill
Reaver	Permanent Bloodlust
Seer	+2 Scouting range
Shadow Mage	Permanent Blur
Sorcerer	None
Summoner	+1 Summoning
Thief	None
Warden	+10% to friendly creatures' defense
Warlock	+10 spell points, +1 spell point recovery
Warlord	+5 to melee attack
Witch King	Fear
Wizard	-2 to spell costs
Wizard King	Inflicts misfortune with attacks

Hero Skills

Hero skills come in nine basic categories. You can learn each of these skills a maximum of five times, and its benefits increase each time you learn it. Skills start at the Basic level and progress through Advanced, Expert, Master, and Grandmaster. You can possess no skill at higher than Grandmaster level. Following is a list of the basic skill categories.

Tactics Skills

Tactics

At Basic level, this skill gives friendly creatures under the hero's control +1 speed and movement in combat. Speed and movement in combat also get +1 with each higher level of tactics skill.

Offense

At Basic level, this skill increases the melee and ranged attacks of creatures under the hero's control by 10 percent. The percentage increases with higher levels of skill.

Defense

This skill increases the melee and ranged defense of creatures under the hero's control by 10 percent. The percentage increases with higher levels of the skill.

Leadership

This skill gives friendly units under the hero's control +1 morale and luck. These bonuses increase at higher levels of leadership.

Combat Skills

Combat

This skill increases the hero's melee and ranged defense to 15. Each successive level of combat skill adds 5 to the melee and ranged defense numbers.

Melee

This skill increases the hero's melee combat skill to 15 and divides the target's defense by 1.5. This skill, however, never reduces a target's defense to lower than 10 and never reduces the defense of an enemy hero. Other melee skills increase melee combat skill by 5 and reduce enemy defense by an additional factor of .5.

Archery

This skill gives the hero a ranged attack of 10 and reduces the enemy target's defense against ranged attacks by 1.5. Like melee skills, archery skills never reduce a target's defense to lower than 10 and never reduce the defense of an enemy hero. Additional levels of archery skills increase ranged combat skill by 5 and reduce enemy defenses by .5.

Magic Resistance

Magic resistance gives a hero a 30 percent chance of avoiding the effects of negative spells cast by enemies. Additional magic resistance skills add 20 percentage points to this chance. A hero at the fifth level of this skill is immune to enemy spells.

Scouting Skills

Scouting

Heroes with this skill see an additional hex when moving on the main adventure map. They also are able to see enemy units that possess stealth skill. Higher levels of scouting skill allow detection of higher levels of stealth skill, and allow the hero to see farther on the main map.

Pathfinding

This skill reduces the basic movement penalty of a hero's army by one-fourth, allowing additional movement on the adventure map. Higher levels of this skill increase a hero's movement ability.

Seamanship

Much like pathfinding, seamanship is used when sailing on open waters. Any hero with this skill gets an additional 25 percent movement. Higher levels of seamanship increase this bonus to a maximum of 200 percent.

Stealth

Heroes who possess the stealth skill are invisible on the adventure map to all but immediately adjacent, first-level creatures and heroes, unless those heroes possess scouting skills. Heroes can hide themselves, but the creatures accompanying them cannot. Higher levels of stealth prevent detection by heroes who possess lower levels of scouting and higher-level creatures.

Nobility Skills

Nobility

The Basic level of nobility allows a hero to be recognized as governor of a town. Any town recognizing that hero as its governor enjoys a 10 percent increase in creature production. Additional nobility levels raise production by 10 percent.

Estates

Estates at the Basic level gives the hero an income of 100 gold per day plus an additional 10 gold for each level of the hero. Each additional skill level of estates increases the amount of gold earned by 100.

Mining

Heroes with mining skill produce two units of ore and wood plus 10 percent of their levels every five days. Additional levels of mining increase this percentage and allow production of other materials as well.

Diplomacy

Before combat, heroes with diplomacy can convert up to 30 percent of an enemy army to fight for them. The hero can convert up to 120 hit points plus 10 percent of the level of enemy troops, and the troops cost only 80 percent of their normal price. Additional levels of diplomacy further reduce the cost of troops and increase the number of units you can convert.

Life Magic Skills

Life Magic

This skill gives the hero the ability to cast first-level life magic spells. Each additional level of this skill adds the ability to cast higher-level spells.

Healing

This skill increases the spellcaster's spell points by 10 and increases spell-point recovery by 2 per day. Additional levels add an extra 10 spell points and hasten recovery by 2 points each day.

Spirituality
This skill increases the effectiveness of the spellcaster's life magic spells by 20 percent. Each additional level of spirituality increases the power of these spells by another 20 percent.

Resurrection
Heroes can use this skill after combat to resurrect 20 percent of the friendly creatures killed in battle. You cannot raise undead, mechanical, or elemental creatures. A hero who possesses the highest level of this skill may restore half of the creatures killed after combat.

Order Magic Skills

Order Magic
The skill of order magic grants the ability to cast first-level order magic spells. Each additional level grants the ability to cast spells of the next higher level.

Enchantment
This skill gives the hero an additional 10 spell points and increases the rate of spell point recovery by 2 per day. Additional levels add another 10 spell points and further hasten the recovery rate of spell points.

Wizardry
This skill increases the effectiveness of order spells by 20 percent. Each successive level of wizardry adds another 20 percent to the effectiveness of order spells.

Charm
With the charm skill, heroes can convert up to 15 percent of outnumbered foes to their side. A hero can convert a small number, and the cost of surrendering is 90 percent the normal price of the creature. Each additional level of charm increases the number of creatures you can convert and reduces the cost by 5 percentage points.

Death Magic Skills

Death Magic
This skill gives the hero the ability to cast first-level death magic spells. Each additional level of this skill increases the level of spells available.

Occultism
The Basic level of the skill of occultism grants the hero an additional 10 spell points and increases spell point recovery by 2 per day. Higher levels of this skill add an additional 10 points and increase recovery rate.

Demonology
This skill increases the effectiveness of the hero's death magic spells by 20 percent. Each additional level increases this effectiveness by another 20 percent.

Necromancy
The Basic level of this skill allows heroes to raise slain enemy creatures as skeletons to add to their army after combat. The number of creatures a hero can raise increases with each level of necromancy attained.

Chaos Magic Skills

Chaos Magic
This skill allows the hero to cast first-level chaos magic spells. Each additional level in this skill allows the next level of chaos spell to be cast.

Conjuration
Conjuration increases a hero's spell points by 10 and the rate of spell point recovery by 2 per day. Each level in this skill adds 10 more spell points and increases recovery rate.

Pyromancy
This skill increases the effectiveness of chaos spells by 20 percent. Each successive level of skill in pyromancy adds another 20 percent to the effectiveness of these spells.

Sorcery
The sorcery skill increases by 20 percent the amount of damage done by the caster with any offensive spell. The damage increases by an additional 20 percentage points with each successive level of sorcery attained.

Nature Magic Skills

Nature Magic
The nature magic skill grants the ability to cast first level nature magic spells. Additional levels of nature magic allow casting of higher-level spells.

Herbalism
The lowest level of herbalism adds 10 spell points to the hero and increases spell point recovery by 2 points per day. Higher levels add 10 spell points per level and increase recovery rate.

Meditation
Meditation increases the effectiveness of nature magic spells by 20 percent. Each additional level of meditation adds another 20 percentage points to the effectiveness of nature magic spells.

Summoning
Heroes with Basic summoning skill can summon wolves, leprechauns, and sprites to their army. At higher levels, they can summon more powerful creatures and more of them on a daily basis.

Warlords Battlecry II

Make your opponents cry with these strategies

By Bruce Geryk and Tom Chick

Bruce and Tom have each designed three Level 15 heroes, who are randomly pitted against each other, leading the race of their choice. The maps are large, randomly generated, with medium resources, no temples, no quests. Each side gets only one army setup point. The first to win two games earns gloating rights until SSG's *Warlords IV* comes out.

Game One: Bruce's High Elves vs. Tom's Undead

Tom's Hero: Bob the Undead Necromancer

A necromancer's skills can help counter some of the Undead weaknesses. Vampirism helps Undead units heal at all times, something they normally do only at night. Darkstorm is a cheap way to give the Undead their +3 weather bonus for night and rain. Call of the Dead, which resurrects skeletons from friendly and enemy casualties after a battle, is perfect for getting instant reinforcements—and if you have the resources to morph the newly summoned skeletons, Call of the Dead can be a game breaker. The summoning spells can fill out an Undead army without costing resources.

I start out buying Bob Skull Lord for half-price skeletons. To get the most out of his spells, I also buy Wraithmaster for +5 casting and Grandmastery, which is expensive but de rigueur if you want to get the most from any sphere of magic. With the remaining ability points, I'll raise his magery skill to 29. Morphing eats an enormous amount of crystal and metal, which accounts for why the Undead are such an expensive race to play. Bob's low charisma—the Undead are ugly, what with worms crawling out their faces—gives him a merchant skill of 6, so everything is more expensive by 15 percent, but his high magery gives him a 21 percent discount on the cost of morphing units.

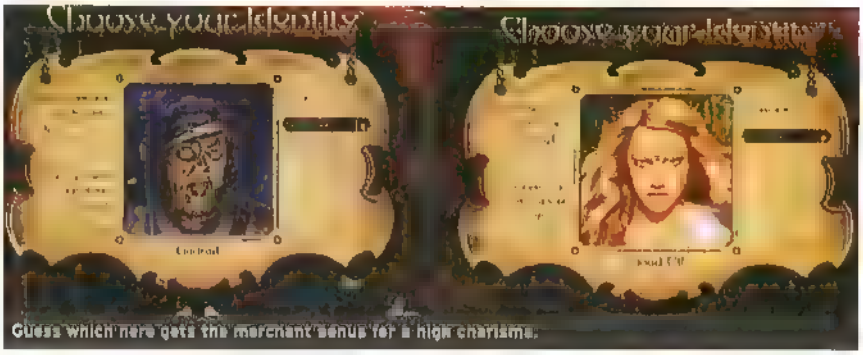
Bruce's Hero: Ann Coulter the Wood Elf Ranger

Although they can research some very effective archery upgrades, High Elves aren't effective melee fighters until they can build their cavalry. They can build phoenixes, cheap flying units that can convert structures. A ranger can complement these strengths with Forest Lord (gets half-price unicorns), Taming (speeds up flying-unit production), and Skylord (makes it cheaper to unlock cavalry). As High Elves can't be rangers, my hero will be a Wood Elf, which still gets me a bonus for leading Elves.

Druidic Magic and Nature Mastery will open up the sphere of Nature. After buying all the spells, I raise her casting skill to 14 and her magery to 20 and use the remaining points to increase speed and command to 14. These are a good place to put extra points, because command extends your morale bonus farther and speed is useful for hasty getaways if things go badly.

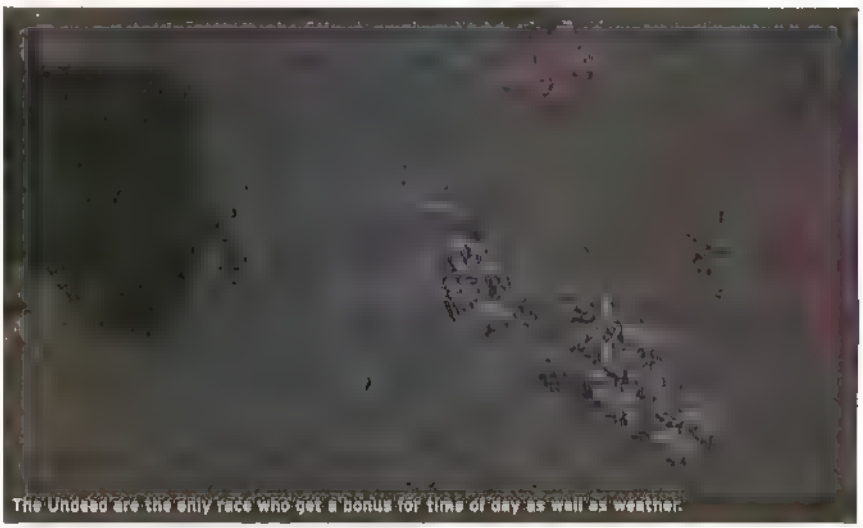
RESULT: Tom wins a crucial early battle and sweeps into Bruce's base.

Tom: From the beginning, I repeatedly cast Summon Champion to bring in vampires. They brought in a steady flow of giant bats, which are great for scouting and raiding resources. Within a few minutes, I had more than a dozen giant bats roaming the map. Because Bruce was using Elves, I accumulated a bunch of skeletons, who take only half damage from Elf archers' arrows. I made sure to store up the resources to morph my skeletons at the last minute and I rushed his base. As the skeletons took damage, I morphed them, converting them to more powerful, fully healed wraiths and

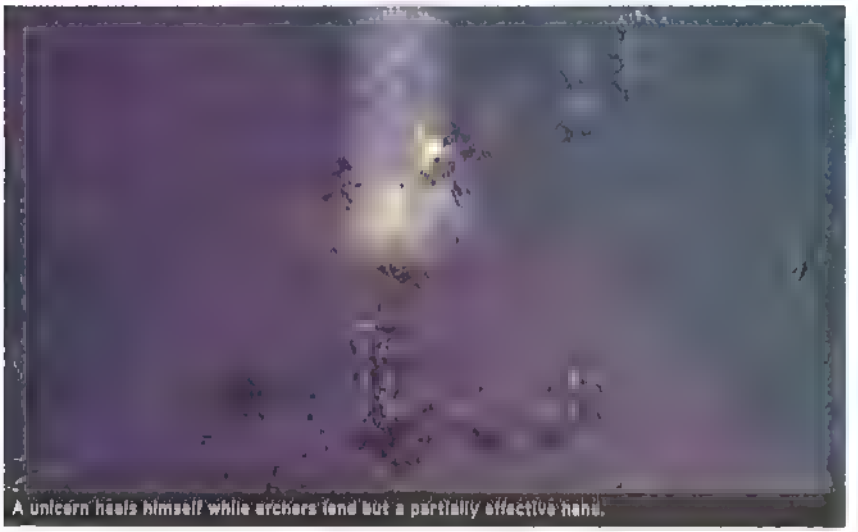


Guess which hero gets the merchant bonus for a high charisma.

Summoning vampires who will in turn summon giant bats.


The Undead are the only race who get a bonus for time of day as well as weather.

Set the AI for spellcasting units so you don't have to hunt for hotkeys in the heat of battle.


A unicorn heals himself while archers lend but a partially effective hand.

Slow units are good for defending resources.

wights. Vampirism and Call of the Dead allowed me to come through that battle with units strong enough to take on his towers and destroy his base.

Bruce: Elves need a lot of crystal for their upgrades, but unfortunately I couldn't get to any other mines. So I concentrated on building an eyrie that would let me make phoenixes to convert Tom's mines. I could have researched Ancient Wisp, and then cranked out wisps in groups of four and morphed them into ancients, which produce crystal at the same rate as a Level 2 mine. But the investment was too great and it would've taken too long.

spent a lot of my hero's mana in a back-and-forth battle changing night back into day (Tom's Darkstorm spell against my more expensive Change Weather spell). I did manage to summon some unicorns and set their AI to magical defender so they would automatically use their healing ability during battle. But before I could research the Rune of Animos to unlock cavalry and build more unicorns, Tom attacked my base. I had only a bunch of archers, which I was in the process of upgrading to counter his bats, but they weren't enough.

Game Two: Tom's Dark Dwarves vs. Bruce's Fey

Tom's Hero: Shopping Spree the Fey Bard

Dark Dwarves are slow to ramp up to power and slow to walk from point A to point B. Thus they have a hard time scouting and controlling the map, so I'm creating a hero to help them. My hero will have high speed, conversion, and command, so he can run around the map early on to grab resources. My hero will also have a high merchant skill to make the Dwarves' units cheaper.

Mr. Spree is a Fey bard with Faery Wings, Song of Charming, Song of Battle, and Rainbow. He also has Song of Heroes for the morale bonus. His high command skill will help him extend his morale bonus to the golems on the front line and the long-range siege engines behind them. The frail Mr. Spree can hang back at a safe distance.

After buying his abilities, I raise his dexterity to 10 (boosting speed and morale) and his charisma to 12 (boosting command, morale, conversion, and merchant). I spend the rest of his points on his merchant skill, raising it 8 points. I dribble the remaining points directly into speed, conversion, and command. This gives him a speed of 26, a conversion of 19, and command, morale, and merchant skills of 28. Everything within his considerable command radius gets +8 to combat and +6 to speed. He's perfect for quickly dashing around the map and grabbing resources away from Bruce. Furthermore, everything costs only three fourths of its normal price.

Bruce's Hero: Bill Bennett the Minotaur Fighter

The Fey are your typical wimpy faerie race: fast but unable to stand up in battle. Consequently, the first priority for any hero leading them is to make them stronger in combat. Minotaurs are the quintessential melee fighters, and a Minotaur fighter hero with both Gore and Weapons Lore abilities does +25 damage. The Charge ability compensates for their slowness. Arms Lore (+6 combat) and General (+5 command) are also helpful.

By buying the Weaponsmaster ability and raising my training skill to 22, my units will start with 16 experience points. After my first dreamhold upgrade, this goes up to 21 experience points, which will make all new units Level 4, giving them a bonus to hit points and combat skill. The Pyromancy sphere has a good healing spell (Cauterize) and a good buff spell (Berserker), so I'll take the Fire Priest ability and buy those. With my remaining points I raise my magery to 12, Pyromancy casting to 12, and command and speed to 18 (I'll need to be able to keep up with my fast Fey units).

RESULT: Bruce's Minotaur catches Tom's Fey bard while he's converting a mine and handily slaughters the little lute-strummer. Bruce manages to power up his Fey and eventually wipe Tom out.

Tom: My goal was to grab mines and then bring stone golems and ballistae up to guard them until I could start building bronze golems and helibores. I'm setting everything up when my stupid bard gets whacked by a giant bull. Suddenly, not only is there a giant bull on the loose, but everything is substantially more expensive because I don't have a merchant bonus anymore! Bruce's overgrown cow keeps rampaging around, smashing up my golems as if they were china dolls.

I was having a hard time keeping up with the rock required to churn out golems, but I had more crystal than I knew what to do with. So I erected an ancestral hall, which not only allowed me to build wraiths and shadows, but also let me instantly summon them (for a higher price). This meant I could use my crystal reserve to call up a quick base defense by pressing a few buttons. Unfortunately, I think I waited too long. I should have built up enough shadows to take the map back rather than wait for him. When he finally came calling with all of his faeries in tow, they'd somehow been beefed up and they casually strolled right over me. Dark Dwarves are slow. And Fey heroes are weak. I'm not sure they're a good combination after all.

Bruce: It's always risky to fight with your hero, but a Level 15 Minotaur fighter isn't in much danger early on, so I sent Bill around the map while I concentrated on upgrading my Fey. If you can afford it, building another dreamhold is a good idea, as it will prevent a production bottleneck. Fortunately, not only did Bill find more crystal, he also found Tom's hero. With this kind of advantage, I had time to build the rainbow to upgrade my resources, as well as get the Faerie Ring upgrade. This was all in addition to the essential Orb of Wonder upgrades.

Meanwhile, I took advantage of the inherent speediness of my units and sent spriggans and sylphs across the map, looking for more crystal. With the extra damage, armor, and experience from my upgrades, as well as a sizable contingent of unicorns set to heal automatically, my troops destroyed Tom's base and took few casualties.

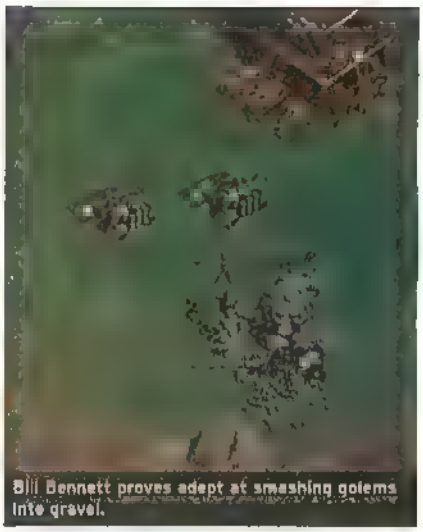
Game Three: Bruce's Orcs vs. Tom's Daemons

Tom's Hero: Circe the High Elf Archmage

Circe is just an elaborate joke. She will turn herself invisible, waltz up to Bruce's army, and then convert them into sheep, cows, geese, and penguins with the Mutate spell. She then escapes with a Home Portal spell so she can do it again, if necessary. But as human players rarely split their armies, a well-placed Mutate will probably eliminate enough resistance that my army can mop up the survivors.

Circe needs spells from the spheres of Illusion and Summoning, so she has to be an archmage. Having bought spells, I need to concentrate on raising her casting skills for the important spheres. Archmage abilities Tenth Circle and Arcane Lore help here, but they won't be enough. Mutate is an expensive spell and coupling it with Invisibility and Home Portal will cost a lot of mana. Also, I can't gamble with a low chance of success. So I spend the rest of my ability points raising my magery to 30 and directly boosting my Summoning casting to 10 and Illusion casting to 13. This gives Invisibility and Mutate an 81 percent chance of success and Home Portal an 84 percent chance. I'll have a capacity of 150 mana. After I've spent 30 on Invisibility, I can try Mutate twice (each attempt costs 50) and still have a chance to get away with Home Portal (which costs 20). That's cutting it close.

The death of Mr. Spree, the Fey bard.


Bill Bennett proves adept at smashing golems into gravel.

She also has the Phantom Steed spell, which is a perfect complement to nightmares, so I'll have Circe lead the Daemons.

Bruce's Hero: Katha Poliitt, Dark Elf Summoner

So far I've played two races that are fairly weak at the outset. To change things up a bit, I'm playing the Orcs. Their downside is that they don't have a lot of high level upgrades, but I don't intend for the game to last that long. To add to my initial punch, my hero will be a summoner, and I intend to get some high-level Daemons into battle quickly. I don't want my hero doing any fighting, so I'm choosing a Dark Elf instead of a Daemon. Dark Elves have a higher intelligence and get a bonus for leading Orcs.

Dark Blade is useless to me, as I don't plan to use Katha in combat. I won't have enough points to specialize in both Pyromancy and Summoning, so I buy Dark Rituals, Daemonlord, and Summoning Grandmastery. After buying all of the Summoning spells, I raise my magery to 22, my command to 14, and my speed to 15. High-level Summon spells are very expensive, so I'll need a lot of mana. With Dark Rituals, my Summoning casting is 15. I'll have a capacity of 110 mana, which is enough to cast two Daemon-gates in a row with a 63 percent chance of success. If I cast a Circle of Power beforehand, the Daemons will arrive with enough experience that they're Level 8!

RESULT: Tom's Mutate trick fizzles, but he manages to ride down Bruce's hero with phantom steeds, only to lose his own hero to a pack of marauding succubi. After a long struggle, Tom gets his titan out first and wins the game.

Tom: I tried Mutate a few times and it didn't seem to have much effect. At most, it would turn two or three units. I later found out from SSG that against some spells (including Mutate) units have a resistance equal to their hero's resistance skill. According to the formula for resisting Mutate, the spell is almost guaranteed to fail while an enemy hero is still alive! I didn't know this at the time, so I kept running up to Bruce's units and trying it. On the third attempt, Circe's Home Portal spell fizzled and she was struck down. By that time, I had three pits producing nothing but nightmares with their speed upgraded so they could effectively dominate the map. I was hurting for crystal, but researching hard labor at the gallows helped somewhat. With my army limit boosted from building extra portals, I got a full complement of nightmares and I accumulated enough crystal to start building my titan. Once Balora, the Daemon titan, arrived on the scene, it was a short trip across the map with her entourage of nightmares, and the game was mine.

Bruce: In their early stages, Orcs are weak on air defense, which makes them vulnerable to Daemons, whose units are mostly fliers. So instead of sending Goblins or Orcs out to get slaughtered from above, I cast Circle of Power followed by a few Soul Harvests, each of which got me four Level 7 succubi. While they were scouting the map and my hero was regenerating mana to throw a few Daemons into the fray, I noticed Tom's Elf hero appear near my base and then vanish. I had no idea what he was doing, but at one point my succubi managed to kill her. Unfortunately, I was losing control of the map because my goblins and wolf raiders couldn't hold out against his nightmares, who eventually managed to kill my hero and put an end to my summoning. I was able to bring a goblin shaman into the battle, whose lightning attacks turned the tide of a few skirmishes. I had managed to get my orchold to Level 5 and my titan was 40 percent done when I heard, "Beware! A titan walks the earth!" And it wasn't mine. Game over.

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Greenspeak

Peddlers of Might and Magic

When good games go bad—a shockingly true tale! **By Jeff Green**

I hate it when this happens. I hate when the games I like go bad. It's not as if we need more bad games here. Our office is full of 'em. For example, just this week Ubi Soft's *Hooters Road Trip* showed up. You don't even have to open the box to know this one stinks. Why? Because it's *Hooters Road Trip*. That said, I did, in fact, open the box and install it after the other guys had left for the day. Why? Because it's *Hooters Road Trip*. So I'm weak-sue me!

The thing is, it's okay for *Hooters Road Trip* to stink because, really, who cares? No one exactly associates Hooters with "good gaming." Ubi Soft could've called this thing *Hooters Proctology Exam*, and the exact same group of guys would've bought it. Plus me.

The same cannot be said, however, for the other bad game that showed up on my desk this week. That game, I'm sorry to say, is *Might and Magic IX*, the latest game in what used to be my favorite RPG series of all time, but which with this release now appears to be circling the white porcelain gaming bowl, like *Ultima* before it. You'll have to wait another month for the official review, but I'll give you the unofficial one right now: bleccch.

***

Okay, I know that's not very professional. I just can't tell you how disappointed I am in this game. My frustration with the way the *Might and Magic* franchise has been handled in recent years has hit the boiling point. I have only two viable choices for dealing with that kind of negative energy before it messes with my digestion, according to my hypnotherapist: Complain about it here in public, or beat up our intern, Chim-Chim. Given that it's now apparently "illegal" for a manager to beat up his employees (so says a stern warning from HR), I'm afraid I must vent here.

What I need to vent is this: Will whoever is in charge of these things please stop with the damn milking of the *Might and Magic* franchise already? I mean, sheesh. Uncle! We give up. You win. You have proven that with enough desperate desire for cash, you can turn even the greatest of creative ventures into a hollow husk of its former self, alienating an entire fan base along the way and turning the name itself into a virtual

***Might and Magic* seems to be circling the white porcelain gaming bowl.**

joke. Bravo. It was one thing to accomplish this with the *Army Men* brand, which is just a rung or two up the ladder from Hooters anyway. But with *Might and Magic*, you had to go out of your way to do this much damage.

Thanks to a series of hasty releases followed by ill-conceived attempts to "grow the franchise" with messes like the already-forgotten *Legends of Might and Magic*, a name that was once synonymous with addictive, compulsive gaming now provokes eye rolling among former fans, like me, who find themselves reloading old games like *Heroes II* and *World of Xeen* in order to purge the ick of the new games and remind themselves of what used to be.

Stupidly, I had high hopes for *Might and Magic IX*, but it has turned out to be the biggest mess of all—an ugly, buggy, poorly written embarrassment. So if my words seem particularly harsh, they are the words of a bummed-out fan who was desperately hoping for a return to glory. I won't be so stupid the next time around.

***

On the other hand, what do I know? Maybe milking the franchise pays the bills and sends someone's kids to college. Who am I to judge? Perhaps I can make up for any harsh words here by offering some new *Might and Magic* ideas of my own, free of charge. You want to extend the franchise? I'm here to help. Here are a few concepts to get this thing rolling:

Leather Boys of Might and Magic
Obese Role-Players of Might and Magic
Might and Magic of Might and Magic
Might You Give Us More of Your Magic Money?
Another Steaming Pile of Might and Magic
Bob and Carol and Might and Magic
Sim Might and Magic Tycoon
Flatulent Canines of Might and Magic
Might and Magic and a CD Full of Porn
Army Men of Might and Magic

Go ahead, guys—they're yours. Take 'em and run with 'em. They may not all be A-plus ideas, I admit, but that seems to have ceased being a priority a long time ago. Good luck, and see you at the bank!

Send your Hate Mail of Might and Magic to the Editor of Might and Magic at jeff_green@ziffdavis.com.

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL SLACK

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